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Conversations with Christ



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Conversations with Christ

A Biographical Study

BY

BERNARD LUCAS.

AUTHOR OF 'THE FAITH OF A CHRISTIAN'

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PRÉFACE

THE four Gospels contain not one, but many portraits of Christ, as they reveal one or other aspect of His rich and unique personality. In the narratives, however, the transition from one to the other is so rapid that the mind fails to retain more than a faint impression of each. We need to isolate the different portraits if each aspect of His varied personality is to produce its full impression. The following study is an attempt to present one of these many striking portraits. It brings before us the figure of Christ, as the Prophet of Nazareth of the common people, who moved in and out amongst them in the closest intimacy, who was accessible to all and in sympathy with all, who dealt with them as individuals in the intimacy of private and personal intercourse. In the picture thus presented to us the background is so commonplace, the environment is so ordinary, that the figures stand out in sharp relief, and the faces reveal all the conflicting

passions and changing feelings of the soul. This portrait of the Jesus of the Gospel interviews is one which well deserves and amply repays the deepest study. Perhaps one of the most valuable results of such a study is the very strong impression it leaves upon the mind, that in these interviews we have before us fact and not fancy, history and not myth. The figures are evidently real men and women, the questions are practical and not academic, the movement of thought is throbbing with life and personality. We may not possess the negatives from which these portraits have been printed, but the pictures have all the characteristics of photographs, and therefore imply both negatives and originals. The portrait of Jesus is too natural to be artificial, too instinct with life to be imaginative, and it has too much personality to be mythical. Here especially we are brought face to face with the Christ of history.

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I

AN ISRAEL BUT NOT A JACOB

John i. 43-51.

PERSONAL influence is one of those subjects in regard to which our knowledge is in inverse proportion to our familiarity. We are intimately acquainted with it both in ourselves and in others. We speak of it as though it were the simplest conception, and yet the moment we attempt to explain it and account for it, we find ourselves in a region of mystery. In those cases in which it is very pronounced, we acknowledge the mystery in the common terms we use to describe it. We speak of it as an infatuation, thereby acknowledging that the person subject to it acts in a manner which is inexplicable. We talk of the fascination one mind exercises over another, meaning that the influence is beyond our powers of comprehension. We even fall back on the language of superstition, and refer to spells and enchantments. If we are under the tyranny of the new creed which some of our scientific leaders seem inclined to impose, we

may possibly talk 'of telepathy, or affinities, or magnetism, and delude' ourselves into the belief that by attaching a label we have explained a mystery. We are apt to forget that every man's inner life is and must be more or less of a mystery to every other man. We are individuals and not atoms, and the atomic theory cannot be applied to us. We cannot be accurately weighed and numbered, and our relations to other atoms definitely fixed. We combine on no fixed principle, we are repelled according to no definite rule. The attraction and repulsion are not necessarily those of one class for another class: they are those of one soul for another soul. The psychologist, if he likes, may, after the manner of the chemist, seek to fix our psychic weight and determine our soul affinity, but we shall behave not according to the laws he may lay down, but according to those of our own personality. We are not concerned with the justification of his theories, but with the satisfaction of our own individuality. The explanation, therefore, of the influence which one person exerts over another must be sought, not so much in the application of general rules, as in the accurate appreciation of the particular relations between the two. There is an explanation which accounts for the fact, though it may not be possible to bring it under any general rule. The response of one nature to another is not irrational, but it is essentially individualistic.

One of the chief factors in the personal influence which one character exercises over another, is due to the presence of a sympathy which is anticipative rather than responsive. To the sympathy which responds to our varying moods, we answer with affection, but to the sympathy which reads us and understands our moods, we respond with devotion. In the first case we recognise the reflex action of our own feelings, in the other case we perceive the presence of a nature which acts upon us, and an influence which moves and controls us. The sympathetic nature which is merely responsive, is a companion with whom we can have fellowship, but the sympathetic nature which is anticipative, dominates us with its influence either for good or evil. The one can read the present, the other reads past, present, and future, infers the past from the present, and anticipates the future. The former knows as much or as little as we like to reveal, the other has a kind of telepathic knowledge of us, and seems to understand us better than we do ourselves. It is this superior knowledge which lays its spell upon us, and brings us under that dominating influence which others do not and cannot understand. There is no hypnotism, for we have not lost our personality, but we have found some one who knows us better than we know ourselves, and in whose judgment we have greater confidence.

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It is the richness of Christ's sympathy in both these respects, which accounts for that remarkable personal influence which He seems to have possessed over His disciples. His sympathy was both responsive and anticipative. He knew what was in men ; He could read character as other men read books ; He could understand moods and anticipate feelings in a way which was unique. His nature was, as it were, telepathic, and He was keenly sensitive to what in these days we are accustomed to call the psychological moment. This is perhaps most evident in those seemingly sudden calls which He addressed to His disciples, and the equally sudden response which they made to His call. This is well illustrated in the call of Nathaniel, which in this respect is the most remarkable of them all.

The information we have about Nathaniel is very meagre. His name is not mentioned by the Synoptists in their list of the disciples, though it has been conjectured that he is the same as the Bartholomew who is generally associated with Philip in their lists. Supposing this to be the case, they give us no information even about Bartholomew. We are dependent upon the Gospel according to John, and to its account of his call, for all the information we possess of him. Slight though this is, there are a few touches which give definiteness to an otherwise shadowy figure. Apparently he was a friend of Philip, to whom he

owed his introduction to Jesus, and possibly also of Philip's fellow-townsmen, Andrew and Peter. Philip having responded to the invitation of Christ to be one of His disciples, hastens to tell his friend Nathaniel of the discovery which he and his two companions have made. There would seem to have been a common understanding between them as to the interests of life about which they were solicitous. They were evidently religious men, and as such the theme of chief moment was the coming of the Messiah of whom Moses and the Prophets had written. Excited with the importance of the discovery he had made, Philip wastes no time over preliminaries, but eagerly announces his news. "We have found Him about whom Moses in the Law wrote, and also the Prophets,—Jesus, the son of Joseph, a man of Nazareth." • Nathaniel is a man whose mind moves slowly, who needs time to think, and who is not at all in the habit of accepting every opinion which is offered to him. • He, too, has his own ideas of the Messiah of prophecy, and has been meditating much upon His coming. Evidently his ideas are such as do not readily fit in with any local personage. His own and the neighbouring village of Nazareth are hardly the places in which he would be prepared to look for the promised Messiah. He is too well acquainted with the condition of things there to expect much from such a quarter. His conception of the Messiah is too exalted to accord well with the probable

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character of a man of Nazareth." "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" It is too near his own home to be able to produce anything but the commonplace. It is far too ordinary a town to be the birthplace of the Messiah of his expectations. Philip is a sympathetic friend, but he has not the telepathic nature which can influence one of Nathaniel's stamp. He knows, however, One who has, and wisely contents himself with answering, "Come and see."

Nathaniel's pace is all too slow for Philip's eagerness. His manner is too phlegmatic for Philip's enthusiasm. The distance is travelled in silence, each being busy with his own thoughts. At length they are near enough for Nathaniel to get his first view of this man of Nazareth who has made such an impression upon his friend. Before, however, he has even scanned the face, the lips open, and he is astonished with the words, "See, here comes an Israel but not a Jacob; a true Israelite in whom there is no deceit." The words are no mere hasty character-reading, such as can be described in abstract terms. There is a personal reference which implies an intimate knowledge. A past experience is suddenly revived in Nathaniel's mind. He takes no notice of the testimony to his sincerity, which is but the superficial meaning of the words. It is the distinction between a Jacob and an Israel upon which his mind is centred. Where was it that that struggle took place between

the meaner and the nobler nature within him? Surely he was alone at the time, and the wrestling was in his own mind and heart. How could this man of Nazareth know anything about it? They had never met before; and not even Philip knew the severe struggle through which he had passed. "An Israel, and not a Jacob"! Yes, that was exactly descriptive of the struggle through which he had come and had prevailed. But how did this man know it? His astonishment expresses itself in the question, "How can you possibly know me?"

"Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig-tree I saw you," Christ answers. It is the simplicity in the reply which makes it forcible to Nathaniel. It is its connection with the previous remark which flashes intelligence into Nathaniel's mind. The possession of a kind of supernatural vision, which most commentators seem to see in the words, is not what strikes Nathaniel. It is rather the insight into his nature and inner life, which strikes with the force of conviction into his mind. Any one, even though unnoticed by himself, might have seen him under the fig-tree, but who could know the struggle between the Jacob of his birth and the Israel of his striving, between the meanness of his actual and the nobleness of his ideal, of which that struggle under the fig-tree was the type and symbol? The link of time and place which his mind has been vainly seeking is supplied. It was under that fig-

tree that his wrestling took place, and the nobler Israel triumphed over the meaner Jacob. It was not that this Man of Nazareth had seen him when he thought himself alone, nor even that He had noticed his mental struggle,—another might have done that,—but it was that He had both seen and understood, had both discerned and interpreted. Nathaniel had never understood himself; his life had been an enigma to him; along with the loftiest aspirations, he had discovered unutterable depths of meanness in his nature. The experience through which he had passed on that memorable day under the fig-tree had been typical of his whole life, though he had not realised it at the time. Yet this stranger whom he had never seen, and with whom he had never talked, had explained in a single sentence the riddle of his life. He had done more than explain the past, He had interpreted the present, and His forecast of the future inspired Nathaniel with new hope, by declaring him to be not the mean and deceitful Jacob of his pessimistic moods, but the Israel of his hopes and striving. The conviction is borne in upon his mind, that the discovery of the Messiah which Philip had announced, must be true. This must be the greater Son of David, Son of God, and promised King of Israel. His phlegmatic nature is at last aroused, and with an enthusiasm even greater than that of Philip, he exclaims, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.”

Christ notices the quick response to a just estimate and a generous interpretation, and predicts much from one who possesses so sensitive a nature. Greater things were in store for an Israel than were possible for a Jacob. The heart that was so quick to recognise the Divine, on finding itself for the first time understood, would see greater things yet. The vision which Jacob saw in a dream, this real Israel would perceive as a fact. In place of the ladder of Jacob's dream connecting heaven and earth, the Divine and the human, he would see the Ideal realised in the Son of Man who was also Son of God. "Because I said to you, I saw you under the fig-tree, do you believe in Me? You shall see greater things than that. In most solemn truth I tell you that you shall see heaven opened wide, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

To the critical mind unilluminated by sympathy, this recognition of Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah is inexplicable. The grounds for it are so lamentably inadequate. "When you were under the fig-tree I saw you," is quite incapable of producing the reply, "You are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel." A true criticism, however, is sympathetic as well as judicial, it is appreciative as well as intelligent. It distinguishes between the connotation of an expression at different periods of time, and between the objective fact and the

subjective appreciation of the fact. Nathaniel is neither a Christian theologian on the one hand, nor a Jewish scribe on the other. His expression, Son of God, means nothing more than the Messiah; but his Messiah is not simply the Messiah of whom Moses and the Prophets wrote, but the Messiah of whom Nathaniel read and interpreted according to his religious needs. There is a Messiah who satisfies the heart, as well as a Messiah who satisfies the intellect; a Messiah who fulfils the desires of the soul, as well as one who fulfils the Scriptures. The recognition of the one is intuitive, the recognition of the other is a process of reasoning. Nathaniel had read the prophecies and was probably familiar with the orthodox interpretation, but deep down in the man's nature there was an interpretation of the prophecies which was based upon the needs of his own heart. When he found One who fulfilled those needs, to whom his secret longings and earriest strivings were an open book, the recognition was the flash of intuition.

• It was this response of the heart which Christ sought for and welcomed. His condemnation of the Scribes and Pharisees for their failure to recognise Him, was not a condemnation of intellectual difficulties, but of moral obliquity. They studied the technicalities of the Law, but they ignored the intuitions of the soul. They instituted a minute inquiry into the letter of prophecy, but they were indifferent to its spirit. They searched the

Scriptures for indications of the place of the Messiah's birth, but they shut their eyes to His actual presence. What the babes instinctively saw, was hidden from the wise and prudent. It is the response of the heart to the Divine which is the essential feature of the religious life, just as it is the response of the heart to the Good which is essential to the moral life.. The intellect may lag a long way behind, its processes of reasoning may require a much longer time to arrive at the conclusion, but we imperil the life of the soul when we are indifferent to its intuitions. Accuracy in the expression of the truth perceived must be left to the intellect, but it is loyalty to the truth perceived which is the essence of the religious life. Our expressions may need constant revision, but our loyalty must not waver. When we have recognised in Jesus the Christ which the heart needs, loyalty demands that we should leave all and follow Him.

II

THE RATIONALIST

John iii. 1-21

THERE is a type of mind which is compelled to look at every subject from the standpoint of pure reason, and whose only method of apprehension is by the exercise of the logical faculty. Its outlook is broad enough to embrace every department of life, but its only avenue of approach is the narrow path of the critical judgment and the strait gate of the logical syllogism. There is a bondage of the intellect as well as a slavery of the passions, and the reason can be as tyrannical as the emotions. There are no departments of human interest where the contrast between the reason and the emotions is so marked as in the case of Art and Religion. They both appeal to the intellectual and emotional side of human nature, and for their truest appreciation, as well as for their best expression, they each need the exercise of both faculties. Neither Art nor Religion can be dominated by either the intellect or the emotions without becoming partial

and one-sided. Under the tyranny of the intellect Art becomes unnatural ; under the tyranny of the emotions it becomes untrue. Similarly, Religion may be so dominated by the reason as to be lifeless, or it may be so subject to the emotions as to be absolutely noxious. There is a constant tendency to exalt the reason above the emotions, or the emotions above the reason ; to regard them as rivals instead of recognising them as copartners. Reason is not the antithesis of faith, nor is faith a substitute for reason. There are things which the reason cannot perceive, because they are spiritually discerned. There are spirits which need to be tried by the critical judgment before they can be pronounced to be of God. Religion is an art as well as a science, and for its just appreciation it needs the help of the emotions as well as of the intellect.

Nicodemus is the type of the religious rationalist, whose only faculty of perception is the intellect. He is the critic in the sphere of religion, whose reason can approve the things that are excellent, but whose spirit has never been thrilled by a responsive emotion. His mind instinctively recognises the true, but his soul is irresponsive to the beautiful. He thinks in logical formulas and speaks in syllogisms. His mind is a rich storehouse of convictions, but his heart is destitute of passion. With religion as a branch of human knowledge he is perfectly familiar, but of religion

as the art of true living he is utterly ignorant. An interview between such a man and Christ is full of interest and instruction.

The statement that he came by night for fear of the Jews, which is usually interpreted as marking him out as a secret disciple, is far more likely to indicate the sensitiveness of intellectual pride than any fear of persecution. Such a mind shrinks from the fear of being regarded as in any need of instruction more than from anything else. It is, as a rule, too serenely philosophical to be troubled by what people may think of its convictions, and its intellectual life is so completely removed from conduct as to be in little danger of encountering persecution. Such a man, however, has so long regarded himself as self-sufficient, that the thought of going to an outsider for instruction, and, above all, of being seen on such an errand, is intolerable. There may be little likelihood of his being so regarded, but his self-consciousness causes mere shadows to appear like substances, and makes him go out of his way to avoid them. The attraction, however, which the unknown has produced is too keen to allow him to keep away, and he will seek for an opportunity of doing secretly what he shrinks from doing openly. A ruler of the Jews would naturally not like to be seen going to the young Prophet of Nazareth, and though he might be willing to sacrifice his own self-esteem, he would hesitate to lose the esteem of the people. The interview itself

lends no support to the idea of secret discipleship. The contrast between opposite natures, rather than the sympathy between congenial spirits, is the dominant note in the conversation. Christ seems to be conscious of the presence of the representative of a party rather than of a would-be disciple, while Nicodemus finds himself in a region of antipathies with which he has nothing in common, rather than in the presence of a master mind with whom he is in sympathetic accord as an eager disciple. There is repulsion rather than attraction, a recognition of incompatibility rather than the communion of kindred spirits. In Nicodemus Christ finds the spirit which rejects testimony, the intellectual strait gate which can admit nothing in the shape of faith. Just in the same way Nicodemus finds in Christ, not the philosopher whom he sought, but the mystic whom he cannot understand. His logical faculties have no room for their display; his critical judgment, accustomed to weigh arguments and analyse premisses, is utterly at fault in the presence of a deep religious experience, and the quick insight of personal faith. He visits the studio of the great painter in the capacity of the art critic, rather than as the enthusiastic disciple anxious to be admitted as a pupil of the Great Master.

His opening sentence reveals the capacity in which his visit is made, and the type of mind which he represents. "We know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do the

works which you are doing except God be with him." The plural pronoun is the substitute for an impersonal cult or school of thought; the conjunction which introduces the reason for his opinion reveals the mind accustomed to move along the formal processes of thought. His secret visit, however, precludes the idea that he came merely as the representative of a class, and betrays a personal interest which must not be ignored. He is conscious of the impression such a visit is likely to produce, and therefore endeavours to express in an impersonal way the opinion he has formed. This is both easy and natural, for the type of mind which Nicodemus represents prides itself on arriving at its conclusions by such exact reasoning, that every other follower of reason must perforce arrive at the same conclusion. He had observed both the Man and His deeds, and by the strictest logic had concluded that such deeds pointed to a more intimate connection between the Teacher and God than he was accustomed to meet elsewhere. Like the art critic he had studied the painter's pictures, and recognised the hand of the Master, and like the art critic who has discovered a new painter, he was just as anxious to indicate his own penetration as to pay a tribute to the painter's genius.

There is an abruptness in the answer of Christ which is designed to dispense with all preliminaries, and deal with essentials. Religion is not a mere

system of thought upon which the mind can exercise its logic, while the soul is untouched and irresponsive. It is a life produced by the touch of the Divine Spirit, and apart from that contact, even the perception of spiritual verities is impossible. The reason may convince us of the existence of God, it may satisfy us of the reality of the relation between God and man, but it can never enable us to perceive the beauty of that life of communion with God which is the very heart of true religion. Reason is the activity of the human mind working on the materials presented to it, and though it may infer a Mind above the human, it can no more attain to communion with that Mind, than the man can lift himself to the starry world his eyes behold. Religion is the activity of the spirit responding to the influence of the Divine Spirit ; a life of feeling, not a process of thought ; a divine conception within the soul, not a human perception. In the deepest sense it is not the stretching out of lame hands to find a God, it is the grasping of the outstretched hand of God. Its origin therefore is from above and not from beneath ; it is the response of the soul to an influence from above, not the erection of an altar to an unknown power to which man bows in subjection. This latter conception man by his reason might create, but the former he can only receive. Until this influence from above has touched the soul, the Divine is beyond the mental vision, an unseen and unknown province

of life. "Except a man is born from above, he cannot *see* the kingdom of God."

Nicodemus is as much disconcerted by this shifting of the standpoint as he is mystified by the style of the reply. He is carried out of the region of premisses and conclusions in which his mind is in the habit of moving, into the domain of the categorical imperatives of conscience and the testimony of spiritual insight. He is at home in the methods of what Kant has called the Pure Reason, but the affirmations of the Practical Reason are as disconcerting as they are perplexing. He realises, however, that underneath the metaphor employed, an entirely new process for the acquisition of knowledge is insisted on; that all his previous training is of no avail, and that he is asked to make a fresh start! The impossibility of such a procedure is the outstanding fact which confronts him, an impossibility as great as the physical rebirth of the metaphor. His mind has developed and grown in a certain definite direction quite as much as his body, and to start afresh in an entirely different direction is as impossible as a return to infancy. He does not attempt to ridicule the use of a metaphor, he takes it up and applies it. He does not dispute the necessity of the new method, he fails to see its possibility. How can the mind, he argues, which has grown old in the use of the methods of the Pure Reason, and has known no other, suddenly discard them and apply the

methods of the Practical Reason. As well expect the old man to start again as the new-born child.

In His reply Christ reaffirms the thought, but expands the idea. There is a twofold birth for man, because there is a twofold nature in man. He is a son of man, but he is also a son of God. The one is an actuality, the other a possibility. He is related to Nature, and therefore there is a natural birth which all have experienced; he is related to God, and therefore there may be a spiritual birth. As long as a man is only conscious of his relationship to Nature, he is merely a natural man, the result of a natural process. To be conscious of his relationship to God, his soul must be responsive to the touch of the Divine Spirit. The germ of the spiritual is in him, but it must be quickened into life, and respond to the influences of the spiritual environment in which alone it can live and move and have its being. The reason is a part of his endowment as a natural man, and its operations are sufficient for all his relationship with Nature, but it deals with sense impressions only, and as long as it is thus limited, it is powerless to bring him into relations with the spiritual. The essence of the religious life, however, is communion with God; a response of the human to the Divine spirit. The quickening of the spiritual, therefore, is absolutely necessary if a man is to enter into that relation with the Divine Father which constitutes the essence of the religious life.

There is no need for astonishment at the necessity for a spiritual birth, nor is there any reason to regard it as impossible. It is mysterious, no doubt; but so are many of even Nature's methods. The eye which observes Nature and her operations cannot see her breathing in the rushing wind, but what the eye cannot see the ear can hear, and though the origin and the goal are alike beyond the reach of either eye or ear, man recognises the presence of one of Nature's forces, and utilises it to bear his boat across the lake, and carry the chaff away from his wheat. It is even so with the breath of God, the Divine Spirit. The reason may not perceive, just as the eye does not see, but the spirit of man feels just as the ear hears, and responding to the inspiration from above, enters into a new kingdom of gracious and life-giving influences.

The pride of class and the prejudice of early training are too potent with Nicodemus to allow him to be convinced. Such a conception of the religious life is a complete reversal of the teaching of the schools; and subversive of the religious organisation in which he has been brought up. To accept it would mean to part company with the traditions of the past, and surrender the position and power he at present enjoys. A teaching which led to such an impossible result must surely be incredible. He feels the force of what has been said, but his logical mind draws the

inevitable conclusion from the new premisses, and he shrinks from the prospect which it presents. Unconsciously he has made his choice, and unknowingly he has rejected the light. Old associations have claimed and secured his allegiance, the ties of party have successfully resisted the attractions of the unique personality of the Prophet of Nazareth. His mind has been too long accustomed to the deductions and conclusions of exact reasoning to accept the testimony of a spiritual experience.

Christ seems conscious of the crisis through which he has passed and of the choice he has made. The individuality of Nicodemus has been absorbed in the character of the official teacher of Israel, his personality has been lost in the membership of a party. The privacy of the interview is at an end; the man before him is henceforth an official; his opinions are the views of a party; his attitude is that of the body of Scribes and Pharisees with which he has identified himself. The conversation, therefore, is no longer of the nature of a private interview: it passes into the nature of a public discourse. This is, at least, a probable explanation of the difference noticeable in the remaining part of the chapter. The transition, however, is perfectly natural. Here is one who professes to be a teacher of religion, whose whole training and upbringing have been intended to fit him for the position he occupies, and to which he

so tenaciously clings, and yet who is in utter ignorance of the very elements of the subject. He is a teacher of spiritual things, but without a spiritual experience himself, and unable or unwilling to appreciate one when it is presented to him. Ignorant himself, he is unwilling to learn from those who know; destitute of any evidence of the spiritual himself, he rejects the testimony which others can offer him. If he will not accept the elementary truth of the necessity for a spiritual birth, how is it possible to impart the deeper truths of the higher life which results from that birth? The man whose sole guide is the light of his own natural reason working on the results of sense impression, cannot possibly penetrate beyond the veil which conceals the spiritual. No one ever has done or ever will do it. That which is at the heart of all religious life, however, is not the conception of an unaided ascent into the higher life of the spiritual: it is the conception of a descent of the Divine into the human life, for the purpose of lifting that lower life to a higher plane. Man is not asked to make himself divine; he is only asked to recognise and respond to the Divine when it is presented to him. Though an ascent has never been made, a descent of the Divine into the human has been made, and stands confronting Nicodemus as he talks. Humanity apart from God is spiritually moribund, as Nicodemus himself bears witness. It attains the more abundant life only as it recog-

nises the Divine Ideal, and fixing its gaze upon the true Son of Man, is changed into His image. Like the old story of life through faith in the brazen serpent, the life which is life indeed, permanent and abiding, is obtained through faith in the Son of Man, the ideal of the Divine conception.

Whether the remainder of the chapter is a continuation of the interview, or the evangelist's comment on the interview, it is difficult to say. The connection, however, in the thought is not difficult to see. The secret of the religious life is not to be found in the conception of man seeking God, but in the truth of God seeking man. It is not the heart of man yearning to express its love for the Creator, it is the heart of God yearning to express its love for His erring children. This is the meaning of the presence of the Son of Man, the unique Son of the Father. He has come not for condemnation but for salvation, not to bring death but life, and life in richer abundance. The life, however, is obtained not by the exercise of the logical faculty, but by the recognition and loyal acceptance of the Son whom the Father has sent as humanity's ideal, and by the outgoing of the heart of man in a loving confidence in the Divine Father. He who accepts that Divine ideal, believing that through Him is obtained the life which is life indeed, is never called up to receive the sentence of condemnation which his past de-

serves. The rejection of the Divine, however, the refusal to respond to the influence from above, inevitably leads to condemnation and death. This indeed is the test by which all men must be judged—their acceptance or rejection of the light. It is not mental perplexity but moral obliquity which keeps men away from the light. It is the fear of self-condemnation for moral offences which prevents men from bringing their actions and motives into the light of God's ideal. And it is this deliberate rejection of the highest which marks the difference between the evil and the good, the honest and the dishonest, the sincere and the insincere. It is not perception of truth which secures Christ's approval, but loyalty to the truth perceived; it is not mental perplexity which calls forth His condemnation, it is moral obliquity.

III

SATIATED BUT NOT SATISFIED

John iv. 4-42.

THE two great impelling forces in human nature are the intellect and the emotions. In the majority of cases the two are fairly evenly balanced and in moderate proportion. In some, on the other hand, the one or the other preponderates, and the life is the response to the stimulus of a great mind, or the impulse of a great passion. The ethical quality of a life is not determined by either an excess of intellect over emotion, or of emotion over intellect. They are but forces which move, not the director, which controls. In many cases, however, the absorption of a great mind, or the intensity of a great passion, while powerless to produce a positive morality, is potent to induce a negative one. A man may be too intellectual to be vicious, he may be too æsthetic to be sensual. The perception of the true may be too vivid to allow of the attraction of evil, the response to the beautiful may be too entire to allow of the fascination of vice. While

it is true that the thinker may be a libertine, and the poet or artist a rake, they are so not by virtue of, but in spite of, their intellectual strength or their æsthetic taste. Vice in their case is due to the reaction of their nature, rather than to the action of their ruling passion. There is a much closer connection between these great operative forces in human nature and morality when they are in defect than when they are in excess. The shallow mind and the hollow heart are indications of a nature peculiarly prone to follow the inditations of fancy and the inclinations of a passing feeling. In such minds there are no convictions which rule as masters, but only fancies which visit as guests; in such hearts there are no great passions which make their home within, but only transient feelings which find a temporary lodging. Thoughts have no room to expand into convictions; feelings have no time to become passions. Such minds are clearing-houses, through which all kinds of merchandise are indiscriminately received and despatched, not treasure-houses in which the jewels and precious stones of thought are carefully deposited and jealously guarded. Such hearts are hotels in which all sorts of feelings are provided with a room, not homes in which the elect are cherished and nurtured.

The woman of Samaria is a typical illustration of the nature in which fleeting fancy has usurped the place of settled conviction, and passing feeling

has seized the throne of a purifying passion. She can talk on any subject, but she has convictions on none. She has many lovers but no husband ; she quickly grasps an idea and as quickly forgets it. Her affection is as easily gained as it is quickly lost. There is a fascination in her which speedily captivates, but she has no power to retain her prize. Her pleasure is in the capture, not in the possession. The capture is an exhilaration, the retention is a weariness. The old love satiates, the new alone affords her pleasure. Such apparently is the character of the woman who with the water-pot deftly balanced upon her head, and the refrain of the latest song upon her lips, comes from the neighbouring village of Sychar to the well where sat the Great Unknown.

The natural request of a tired and thirsty wayfarer which Christ prefers, is addressed to one who is more accustomed to speak without thinking than to think without speaking. The astonishment which another woman might have felt but would not have expressed, this one at once gives expression to. Another might have been glad of the opportunity of avoiding a conversation with a stranger by at once acceding to His request ; this one is glad of the opportunity of a conversation, and therefore postpones acceding to the request. Her curiosity must be satisfied before the stranger's thirst is allayed. Her interest is aroused in this unknown stranger. He is evidently a Jew, but no

ordinary one, or He would never have asked a Samaritan for a drink, however thirsty He might have been." She expresses her astonishment and asks for an explanation.

The question was a simple one, but it appealed to the instincts of the Great Teacher, dispelling His weariness and banishing His thirst. It was but a woman's curiosity, but it betokened a quick perception and an inquiring mind. She had used her opportunity for opening a conversation, He would use His for imparting instruction. She had perceived that though His request was an ordinary one, it denoted that He was no ordinary Jew. If she knew who He really was, and what her own actual need was, the positions might have been reversed, and she have been the asker and He the giver. "If you had known that other free gift of God, and who it is who asks you for a drink of water, you would have asked of Him, and He would have given you living water." Her knowledge of life is superficial, not deep. She perceives the obvious, but not the more recondite. She can understand a physical need, she has no knowledge of a spiritual want. She can see that He is no common Jew, she does not yet perceive that He is a prophet. She understands that He is thirsty, she does not realise that her own soul is parched. If her knowledge were deeper, she would perceive that He is other than He seems, and she herself would soon become other than she is.

There is a touch of pique in the answer she makes. She has been accustomed to shallow flattery, and resents the commiseration she thinks she perceives in the reply. The good opinion she has of herself has been touched, and her resentment manifests itself in the veiled sarcasm which is characteristic of a little mind. With a woman's ingenuity, however, she conceals it under the mask of a well-feigned astonishment. "Sir," she answers, "you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. From where then do you get this living water? Are you greater than our forefather Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank of it himself, as did also his sons and his cattle?" Whatever curiosity she feels is confined to the person, it does not extend to the subject of which He speaks. The living water is only water, the thirst which it allays is merely physical. She perhaps has a suspicion that He may be a magician, she has not yet the conviction that He must be a prophet.

Christ is as unmindful of the sarcasm as He is of His own thirst; He is as mindful of the woman's need as He is regardless of her curiosity. That she should understand what He says, is more necessary than that she should know who He is; that she should recognise the superiority of the living water is of greater importance than that she should acknowledge His pre-eminence over Jacob. He is more anxious to stir her spiritual nature than to satisfy her idle curiosity. There is a

deeper thirst than the water with which she is familiar can allay ; there is a perennial spring which invests life with a deeper joy than she is acquainted with. The only pleasure with which she is familiar is one that soon palls, the surface knowledge of life which she possesses quickly satiates but never satisfies. The thoughts and ideas to which she gives a ready access are but vagrants of the mind, night revellers who depart as readily as they come, and whose presence is marked by the refuse and defilement they leave behind. There are nobler conceptions and higher ideals, whose presence would enrich and grace the home, which would come not to sojourn, but to abide. The passing fancy which she so readily harbours in her heart as quickly departs, leaving her weary and unsatisfied still. There is a deeper and nobler passion which ennobles and purifies. "Every one who drinks of this water shall thirst again, but he who drinks of the water which I can give him, never thirsts, but has a perennial spring which never runs dry, and which can never be exhausted." Christ sees the true woman beneath the domino in which she masquerades ; He hears the sigh of a weary soul above the hollow laugh, and divines the aching heart beneath the disguise of a smiling face.

His words have as yet only penetrated the outer ear of sense, not the inner ear of her soul. She thinks only of the continual coming to the

well for the daily supply ; she is conscious only of the thirst which the hot day and oppressive night induce. Half in earnest and half in mockery she replies, " Sir, give me that kind of water, that I may never be thirsty again, nor be compelled to come all the way here to draw." She has so long ministered to the outer senses that the inner ones are dull and torpid. The superficial has so long absorbed her, that it is difficult to arouse her interest in the deeper things of the spirit. She has grown so accustomed to the loud and coarse voices of sense, that the still small voice of her truer self passes unnoticed. Her conversation has consisted of the flippant word and the unmeaning expression ; her mind has worked automatically, the careless answer following quick upon the careless question, without effort on her part. It needs the shock of an apparently abrupt and startling inconsequence to divert it from the trivial to the serious, to change its automatic responses to the conscious answers of an earnest and thoughtful mind. " Go and call your husband, and come back again."

As far as the woman is concerned there is an abrupt break in the conversation, as far as Christ is concerned there is a distinct logical sequence. He has been speaking to the woman's inner self, she has been listening and responding with her outer self. She has been, as it were, carrying on a conversation at a distance by means of a tele-

phone ; suddenly there is a cessation, and she is startled by the same voice speaking close beside her. He has been speaking in metaphor, while she has been interpreting literally. He suddenly drops the metaphor, and with startling directness uses plainness of speech. She has asked for the living water that she may never be thirsty again, nor be compelled to come constantly for a fresh supply. Christ sees that unconsciously she has spoken in a metaphor, and expressed in a symbol the tragedy of her life. She has substituted the ~~true~~ for the false, and her life is a weary and endless attempt to satisfy a thirst which the water with which she is familiar fails to quench. She has no husband to satisfy the love of a deep and passionate nature, and therefore she is thirsty still. She has tried many lovers as substitutes, and she is weary of the constant attempt to satisfy a quenchless thirst. If she is to understand anything about the living water she asks for so lightly, she must first perceive the difference between the real and the false. To her the way of salvation lies in discriminating between the husband her nature needs, and the lover her inclination fancies. Is it water to drink and thirst again, or living water for which she asks? Hence the command—"Go call thy husband."

Husband ! what can He mean? What connection can there possibly be between the talk about living water and the invitation to call her

husband. Her astonishment this time at the stranger's request is too deep merely to arouse her curiosity, as when the Jew asked the Samaritan for water. The artificial woman in her which is so ready with an answer is silent, and the real woman who is so seldom heard, speaks. The lightness of the one has given place to the seriousness of the other. There is neither the flippancy of a coarse nature nor the sensitiveness of a refined nature in her reply, but the spontaneity due to the surprise of her natural self. She does not stop to think what her words mean to herself, nor what impression they will produce upon the stranger. His abrupt question has surprised her into a confession of sin, and startled her into an avowal of her shame. Before she knows it, the words have slipped out, "I have no husband."

With that keen insight which marks the sincere nature, Christ detects the half-truth to which the woman has given expression; with the delicate sensitiveness which marks the pure nature, He is conscious of the reality which is concealed beneath the ambiguous sentence. "You are correct in saying you have no husband, for those you have had are husbands no more, and he whom you now have is no husband at all. In that matter you spoke truer than you intended." The water of which she has drunk has not satisfied, for she has indeed thirsted and thirsted again. She has captivated the eye, but she has failed to capture the

heart. Divorce has followed marriage, and marriage divorce in quick succession. She has gratified a wish, not satisfied a passion ; she has pandered to the animal, not ministered to the spiritual. The temporary has had more attractions than the permanent ; a lodging, has been more easily provided than a home. She has tried many husbands but found no true lover ; she has tried a so-called lover, but found he is no husband. She is thirsty still in spite of her constant visits to the well ; her home is desolate in spite of its many visitors. "I have no husband," is not the mere statement of a fact, it is the revelation of a tragedy. It does not merely point to a deserted home, it indicates a desolate heart. It is far more than a literal fact, it is a symbol with a much wider significance. Her life has been the pursuit of a happiness which has eluded her grasp, the substitution of shadows for substances, a carouse which has satiated, not a feast which has satisfied. The past is a record of disillusionment, the present a dissatisfaction, the future a vision of weariness. She has no husband ; she has a house, but no bond to transform it into a home. She has a mind through which idle fancies flit, but no thought to change them into cherished convictions ; she has a heart open to every passing feeling, but with no deep emotion to transfigure affection into a pure and passionate love. She has no husband, and her truer nature protests against its incompleteness.

At last she understands something of the true nature of the stranger with whom she is talking. The deeper meaning of His words has forced itself upon her attention. He is not a magician, but a prophet; the subject of conversation is not material, but religious. Her moral feeling, however, is too deadened to be quickened by a word; her conscience has been too long neglected for its voice to be familiar. Religion, as she understands it, is a subject with which she thinks she is familiar. It has formed the theme of many a discussion, its speculations have afforded her many an opportunity for sharpening her wit at the expense of her neighbour. The controversy between Jew and Samaritan is well known to her, and she welcomes the opportunity of asking this prophet whom she has discovered for His view on the vexed question. "Our forefathers worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews say that the place where people ought to worship is Jerusalem." This is not the adroit turning of the conversation on the perception that it is becoming too serious, in which some women are adepts. It is the counter-attraction of a new subject, which has suddenly come into her mind, by the perception of the character of the person with whom she is conversing. She is too pleased at discovering who the stranger is, to trouble to consider what she herself is. It is the prick of curiosity, not the sting of conscience under which she is acting. To

touch upon a new subject is more attractive to her nature than to follow out an old one. She has as superficial a conception of religion as she has an unsatisfactory view of morality. A correct position is of more importance than a contrite heart. The place of worship is of more consideration than the spiritual condition of the worshipper.

Christ seems to realise that His effort to arouse her conscience has failed. The moral instincts which caused her at first to conceal the looseness of her life under the thin veil of the marriage ceremony have now ceased to be operative. The proprieties have lost their influence over her. The conscience has become so lifeless, that opiates are no longer necessary. The phrase which would have brought the blush of shame to her cheek years ago, is now heard with indifference, and treated with unconcern. She can now say she has no husband, with all that it implies, and think no more about it. She has had a stroke of moral paralysis which has affected one side of her nature. On the side of her relations to her neighbour, she is inaccessible. She has no moral feeling, the nerves are incapable of responding to any external stimulus. If she is to be touched at all, it must be on the religious side, in the direction of her relation to God. Here there is some slight sign of life, some faint desire to know what is right. It is nothing more than the desire to be directed to a proper place of worship, but even that is

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better than absolute indifference. Christ therefore takes up the question she has asked, and seeks to deepen the silted-up channel along which it is alone possible for some higher influence to reach her. "A time is coming," He answers, "when the sanctity of place will give way to sincerity of worship; when both Jew and Samaritan will feel that it is of more consequence how they worship, than where they worship. You worship," He proceeds to say, "One whom you do not really know; of whom you have heard, but of whom you have no experience. We worship One whom we know, with whom we have intimate relations; for the true knowledge of God, which is life and salvation to the soul, is the birthright of every Jew. A time is coming however, in fact has already come, when the true worshippers of whatever race will worship the Divine Father of all men, and worship Him, not with the body but with the spirit, not in pretence but in sincerity, for indeed the Father is Himself seeking such worshippers. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must do so spiritually and sincerely." Christ recognises that beneath all the shallowness of the woman's mind, there is a saving strain of honesty in her nature. It was this which caused her to dispense with the fiction of the marriage ceremony, when the reality of the marriage bond ceased to have any meaning for her. It was this, too, which prompted the words, "I have no husband," and

denied the name to the man who had no claim to the title. Christ makes His appeal therefore to this leaning of her nature in the direction of sincerity; this distaste for mere sham and pretence. She has worshipped an unknown God, while her soul has all along cried out for the Divine Father; she has joined with the crowds in a heartless and unmeaning ritual, while her spirit has craved communion with the Father of spirits. The Father has all the time been seeking for the true worshipper within her, and the time is coming, may in fact have already come, when she will have done with an unreal ceremonial, and substituted the sincere devotion of the soul; when in place of the unknown God whom she has ignorantly worshipped, she will find the Father, and her whole nature will respond in a passion of love and self-abandonment.

Christ has at last found a responsive chord in the woman's nature. Her life has been a failure because the right saving influence has never been forthcoming. The true husband would have made her the true wife. The great love which her heart needed had never come; the one who would have satisfied her better nature had never arrived. An unsatisfied love had but debased her, a love that satisfied would have elevated her. If she had only met the right man, what a wife she would have made! If the consuming passion of a noble love had but been kindled in her breast, how it would have purified her nature! If the man had

come up to the ideal her mind had pictured, he would have satisfied the love of which her heart was capable. It was just the same with her spiritual nature. She knew the Messiah was coming, and that when He did come, He would be able to tell her all she needed to know. But, alas! He had not come, and she was thirsty still. Her mind was in doubt and perplexity as she listened to the wrangling of Jew with Samaritan over the relative merits of Zion and Gerizim, and her heart longed for One who would tell her what she really wanted to know, in order that the religious instincts of her nature might find their true object of worship. Though the Jew despised the Samaritan, and the Samaritan hated the Jew, yet she knew that both alike awaited the coming of Him who could alone satisfy their common need. She worshipped an unknown God, the shadow of a divinity connected with the shadowy figures of long-dead ancestors, who were but names to her. She longed for the Messiah of the Living God, who should give reality to the religion she still cherished in her heart, but which had long ceased to operate in her life. When He came, for whom her soul waited, He would tell her everything, and His presence would give completeness to her life.

Christ had failed to penetrate beneath the surface of this woman's moral nature, but He had stirred the depths of her religious nature. She

had utterly failed to see the imperfection of her moral life, but she was deeply conscious of the incompleteness of her religious life. She had long since given up all hope of finding the man of her ideal who would satisfy the yearning of her heart, but she still cherished the hope of the coming of the Messiah who would fulfil the desire of her soul. The death of the one hope had probably given new life to the other. The coming of the Messiah had become a conviction of which she was assured. She did more than hope, she felt that He would come. Christ was deeply moved by this declaration of religious faith in one who was a moral sceptic. "Amidst the wreck of her moral ideals, she had retained her faith in the spiritual. She had lost faith in man, but she still retained her faith in God. She who had been so often deceived by men, and disappointed in her social relations, still clung to her faith in God, and expected the coming of the Messiah of promise. Her faith called forth His confidence. Her confident expectation evoked his plain declaration. He could not keep such a soul in suspense. His coming meant salvation to her. Hers was a nature which judged by instinct, recognised by the attraction it felt, estimated by the impulse it received. Moral maxims were impotent, personal influence was all-powerful over her nature. Morality had no attraction for her, the Messiah enraptured her soul. If she was to be saved at all

it could only be by the influence of a personality, not by the injunctions of the moral code. She was of those who never betray a confidence nor prove traitors to a trust. Her nature would respond to a generous confidence, her heart would be loyal to a sacred trust. He could say to her, and be confident that she would believe Him, "I am He, even I who am talking to you."

Never did the disciples arrive at a more inopportune time, never was an interruption more exasperating. The interview is cut short just when it is becoming of absorbing interest. The woman departs and leaves us nothing but an empty water-pot. What was the impression which this confidence of Christ produced? What was the answer she was going to utter, when the sight of the returning disciples closed her lips? Whatever it was, she evidently felt she could not give expression to it before the disciples. It was too personal to be made public; it was too sacred for strangers to hear. We may, however, draw an inference, though we are precluded from making an assertion. Her words to her neighbours are full of significance: "Come and see a man who has told me everything I have ever done. Is not this perchance the Messiah?" There is the echo of the words of her religious anticipation—"When the Messiah comes, He will tell us everything." Has expectation passed into realisation, as she recalls the astonishment with which she heard Him

refer to her past? Is she seeking from others a confirmation of the faith which has already found a home in her breast? Is the eagerness with which she brings her neighbours to His presence, an indication of her consciousness of the blessing she has herself received? It would seem so, and Christ's words to the disciples confirm the impression. He feels that He has been watching the ripening of a soul, and the fields whitening for the harvest are the metaphor which He employs. Fields ripe for the sickle meet the eyes of the disciples; the Master's gaze is fixed upon the woman returning with her neighbours. Two more days and the harvest is gathered in, the first-fruits of a woman's faith in the Messiah for whom she has waited so long.

IV

THE ECLIPSE OF FAITH

Matt. xi. 2-15 ; Luke vii. 18-28.

HUMAN life is full of contrasts. Light and shadow, joy and sorrow, exhilaration and depression, success and failure, alternate in every life, and leave their indelible marks on every character. Sensitiveness is a swinging pendulum, the farther it goes in one direction, the farther it is compelled to go in the opposite direction. What the equable temperament gains on the one hand, it of necessity loses on the other. The sorrow of the less sensitive nature may be slight, but its joy is proportionately diminished. A perfect equilibrium would be a complete insensibility. The relation between perception and feeling is similarly proportioned. The keener the perception the more intense is the emotion. Humanity pays for its superiority over the animal, but it receives a just equivalent. The law of compensation is a kind of psychical law of gravity. Like children, playing on the sea-shore, however, we rejoice when

the tide is in, but complain when it is out. Gravitation is a grand thing when it lifts our weights; it is anything but a grand thing when it presents its bill for the assistance it has given.

We should have little to complain of, however, if it were not that the human factor so often interferes with the working of the natural law. The payment which nature demands is but the discharge of a debt which we have already incurred, or the prepayment for a blessing which will undoubtedly come. We have either already received ~~or~~ may confidently expect to receive an exact equivalent. The inequality comes when the human element interposes and compels us to pay for debts which others have contracted. The stone which another hand has thrown in wantonness, the law of gravity returns upon our heads. The energy we have expended in raising the weight, another uses for his own advantage. The possible which we have perceived, another's action converts into an impossible. Nature does not distinguish between individual and individual; she deals with humanity as a whole, and pays her debts to any one of the partners. To her they are all members of the same firm, and she presents her accounts to all indiscriminately, and cashes every cheque to bearer, never to order.

In our early days we are all more or less seers, and our souls are entranced as with the vision of an ideal kingdom of heaven, which we announce with

joy and proclaim with all the assurance of faith. The experience of life, however, brings us face to face with the actual, our vision becomes dim, or we find "the powers that be" too strong for us, and from the prison-house into which our souls have been thrown captive, we send forth our messengers of perplexity to ask questions which have proved too much for us. There are two kinds of depression resulting from two very different kinds of captivity. There is the depression ending in despair, which comes to us when, like Samson, we are grinding in the prison-house into which our own folly has cast us, and we are paying the price of our own waywardness. But there is also the depression, which is but a temporary clouding of the soul, which comes to us as it came to John the Baptist, cast into the dungeon of a Herod, and excluded from the free and open life to which he had been accustomed. In both cases we are suffering from the swing of the pendulum, and our present depression is in direct proportion to our former elation. We have encountered the problem of suffering in both cases; but in one case it is the suffering due to our own sin, while in the other it is the suffering due to the sin of others. There is depression in both cases, but it is only in the latter that mental perplexity adds its more poignant sting.

The captivity of John the Baptist could not fail to work its full measure of depression upon his

nature. Accustomed to the free air of heaven, the fœtid atmosphere of the dungeon asphyxiated his soul. Used to the blue sky, the wide expanse of the desert, the light of the sun by day, and the moon and stars by night, the cramped and dingy quarters in which he was confined could not fail to work their full measure of ill both to body and mind. The vision of the ideal kingdom of heaven which his soul had perceived, his fancy had been accustomed to give form and colour to, out of the fleecy clouds and many-tinted rainbow of his out-of-door environment. It was inevitable that, shut up in the darkness of Herod's dungeon, the vision should grow dim, and his physical discomfort react upon his serenity of soul. Vague and uncertain rumours reached him, probably distorted by the prejudices of some of his own disciples, as to the doings of Him whom he had hailed as the Lord's Anointed. In place of the righteousness and peace of the kingdom of heaven whose near approach he had so confidently announced, he found himself the victim of the actual kingdom of Herod, and suffering for the boldness with which he had denounced the King's adultery. Had he been precipitate in his announcement of the nearness of the heavenly kingdom? had he mistaken a fellow-herald for the One who must come if Israel were to be redeemed? Great things were happening in the outside world, the time was big with coming events, yet there was no one to interpret the signs of

the time, and he himself, the only seer in Israel, was a captive. If he could but get speech with that other kindred soul, whether he were herald of the One who must come, or the veritable coming One Himself, his perplexity would vanish, his peace of mind would return. A personal interview was impossible, but an interview by deputy was still open to him. Calling two of his disciples upon whom he could depend to faithfully carry his own message, without adding any comments of their own, and who would as faithfully bring back the answer upon which so much depended, he sent them with the message of a perplexed but not despairing mind, a question of faith and hope, not of doubt or despair. The question reveals the man, and adds to our admiration of his character. It was evidently so interpreted by Christ, and called forth His panegyric on the greatest of Israel's seers. While the question shows the perplexity into which circumstances had thrown him, it yet reveals that faith in the ideal which no adversity could touch. It betrays the diffidence of a humble mind, coupled with the confidence of an assured faith. He feels that he may perhaps have been mistaken as to details, but he has no doubt as to the fact. He may have been mistaken as to the nearness of the approach, but he has no fear that he is mistaken as to the reality of the coming. The vision which he has seen is yet for the appointed time, and though it tarry it will not delay. That

it will surely come he has no doubt, and if he has mistaken the proximity of its fulfilment, he will confidently wait for it. He may have miscalculated distances, but his vision has not betrayed him. He whom he took to be the King may be only the herald, but the King will surely come.

John had apparently well chosen his messengers, and his reliance was well placed. They add no comments of their own, however much they may have been tempted. They make no attempt to explain the message, but content themselves with asking the question with which they were charged. It would seem from the account in Luke as though, conscious of the importance of their mission, they interrupted the work of healing in which Jesus was engaged, and with an abruptness indicative of the sense of the urgency of the case, asked the question with which they had been charged. With the briefest introduction, "John the Baptist has sent us to you with this question," they repeat the exact words of their master—"Are you the One who must come, or are we to look for Another?"

That insight into the heart of a question, which is so characteristic of Christ, is evident in the reply He makes. There is no delay in answering the importunate question. His continuance of the work of healing is a part, and an essential part, of the answer. The question seems to be so simple as to merely necessitate a plain yes or no. Questions, however, must always be interpreted in

the light of the questioner's state of mind, not merely in the light of his logical expression. An answer must always be adapted to the capacity of the questioner to understand. The truest and best answer consists in enabling the man to answer his own question. The categorical answer may be a perfect solution of the problem, but it may fail entirely to enable the mind which has perceived the problem to appreciate the solution. The deepest problems of life no one can solve for us, we must solve them ourselves. The mind which has entered the maze of perplexity and doubt must thread its own way through all the intricacies of the path, before it can arrive at the longed-for goal. This is where the test of the true teacher comes in. For a hundred men who can solve a problem, there is only one who can relieve the mind of the perplexity which the problem has produced. The true teacher must not only understand his subject, he must equally understand the mind of his pupil. Teaching is causing a man to learn, and he who cannot sit on the pupil's bench has no qualification to occupy the teacher's chair.

John had recognised in the character of Christ the Messiah of Jewish expectation. He had proclaimed Him as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Of the spiritual nature of the kingdom of God he was fully assured, and his ministry had been a vigorous call to repentance. His perplexity arose out of the rumours which

were brought to him of the work of Jesus and the delay in the visible manifestation of the kingdom of his prophetic vision. Could this healer and teacher, great though He might be, be the Messianic King for whom Israel waited? Had he been over-hasty in judging of the office which Jesus was destined to fill from the character He bore? This was the difficulty in which John found himself, and Christ enters into it with the fullest sympathy and the keenest insight. He conducts the mind of John back to the old path of spiritual insight; He leads the captive seer to the Mount from which he had caught his first vision of the coming King. John had made no mistake in method, his vision had played him no tricks, but the walls of the prison had shut out the visible evidence, and only left him the memory of a past experience. The King must be judged and recognised by His character; the Messiah must do the Messiah's work. The title might be assumed by any one, the work could be done by One alone. The eyes of the captive's disciples must see what the captive himself could not behold; the disciples' lips must convey what the prisoner could not discover. Christ therefore turns to the work in which He had been interrupted, and continues His ministry of healing and help, that the messengers might see what their master needed to see but was prevented from seeing.

While there is the keenest insight into John's

perplexity, there is the fullest appreciation of his power of discernment. Christ correctly estimates the pupil's difficulty, but He does not make the mistake of underestimating his capacity. John was familiar with the Messianic prophecies, and Isaiah was doubtless his favourite prophet. The description of the Messiah's work contained in the sixty-first chapter was probably his constant meditation. The prophecy with which John was familiar, Christ fulfils in the presence of the messengers, knowing that John's mind will enable him to work his own way to peace and rest. Then turning to the waiting messengers He bids them go and tell John what they had themselves seen and heard, describing almost in the words of Isaiah the work in which they found him engaged.

If the answer reveals Christ's appreciation both of John's perplexity and also of his power of discernment, it no less exhibits the sympathy of Christ for the captive prophet. One of the keenest trials of John's imprisonment must have been the cessation of his life's work of preaching the good news to the poor. The coarse prison fare was nothing to the ascetic prophet, the loneliness of his confinement was a trifling matter to the dweller in the desert, but the cessation of his work, to one so keenly alive to its importance, must have been the bitterest portion of his cup. Christ felt for the preacher forced into a premature retirement, and with a touch of the tenderest sympathy

bids the disciples tell 'their master that though he is laid aside, the work still goes on, and the poor have the gospel proclaimed to them.

His final words ere they return to their captive leader are words of benediction and hope. He recognises how easy it is, for the seer, whose enforced captivity has so cruelly deprived him of sight, to stumble and fall. Unable to see for himself, 'dependent upon rumour, often distorted by prejudice, surrounded by the 'depressing influence of a prison, it is no easy matter to keep the lamp of faith burning, to avoid the pitfalls and obstacles to which the fervent religious nature is exposed. At the same time, Christ feels confident that John's faith will not fail him, that though sight, as it were, has been lost, he will yet be able to enter into the blessedness of those who walk by faith and not by sight. "Tell him," He seems to call to the departing disciples, "that blessed is he, captive though he be, who finds no occasion for stumbling in Me or My work."

Religious faith is peculiarly liable to those temporary eclipses which passing events produce upon the keenly sensitive nature. Again and again the question of a perplexed faith comes forth from the prison-house of the soul, inquiring whether the vision which we have perceived in our hours of insight has not, to some extent at least, been misunderstood. In these days of critical inquiry and minute investigation into the records that have

come down to us of the life of the Prophet of Nazareth, rumours often distorted and one-sided are brought as to the nature of His person and His work. Precluded from a personal investigation, depressed by the gloomy environment in which circumstances have placed them, those who in their earlier days recognised in Him the Saviour of the race, and heralded the coming of the kingdom, wonder whether they have not misinterpreted and misunderstood, and repeat the question of John: Was Jesus of Nazareth the One who must come if the world is to be saved at all, or must we still look for Another? To such natures the answer of Christ is the only one that carries conviction. The character of Jesus which first captivated their souls is the evidence of His fitness for the position they assigned to Him, and the work that He is still doing is the guarantee that He and He alone is the One for whom humanity has waited. Whatever the explanation of His appearance may be, whether an Evolution or an Incarnation, He still stands unrivalled in the history of the race. If He be an evolution, then human nature has apparently exhausted itself in His production, for there has been no second. It is the same with His work. If sin is to be overcome, and man is to be saved at all, there is no evidence that apart from Him and His influence, redemption is possible. Whatever reproach may be brought, and justly brought,

against the deeds that have been done in His name, there can be no question that the purest and noblest lives which the world has seen have been the result of His influence. The regenerating influences in the world to-day are all traceable to the life of Jesus of Nazareth. We look in vain for a rival to the character of Christ, and we look equally in vain for a substitute for the salvation which comes through Christ.

V

RELIGIOUS CONSERVATIVES

Matt. ix. 14-17 ; Mark ii. 18-22 ; Luke v. 33-39.

OUR true attitude to the past is one of reverence, to the present one of respect, and to the future one of sympathy. We are heirs of the past, stewards of the present, and trustees of the future. The great law of evolution has emphasised our indebtedness to the past by showing us how the permanent and valuable acquisitions of the race are transmitted to the heirs of the ages ; it has emphasised our relations to the present by pointing out the importance of environment ; and it has emphasised our relation to the future by showing how the whole process of Nature is striving for a richer and more abundant life, and that where one generation fails to attain, it prepares the way for the generation that is to follow. If we despise our inheritance, therefore, we are not likely to make use of the opportunity it affords us of enjoying our possession, nor are we likely to anticipate the still greater enjoyment which is in store for our

descendants. If we are unmindful of the acquisitions of our ancestors, we are not likely to increase the estate that has come into our possession, nor look forward to its still greater increase by those who are to follow us. In the same way, if we are so attached to the past as to be careless or indifferent to the altered conditions of the present, and the tendencies which indicate a still more altered future, we are untrue to the trust which has been committed to our care. The past is a great inheritance, the present a splendid opportunity, and the future a noble incentive. Failure to respond to any one of the influences means delay and hindrance in the direction of true progress. We may be so enamoured of the past as to be indifferent to the claims of the present or the promises of the future. We may be so engrossed in the present as to be oblivious of the past and careless of the future. The influence of the past may be so strong as to lead us to try and reverse the engine ; that of the present may tempt us to a headlong rush down a steep decline ; that of the future may be so inviting as to induce us to leave the highway and try some of the many inviting short cuts which seem to lead to the desired goal. He is the great man who can feel all the influences, and give the right response to each.

In the sphere of religion the influence of the past is much more powerful than in any other. Its subject-matter is so sacred that reverence becomes

worship, customs become mysterious rites which it is sacrilege to alter and impious to question, while opinions become fixed beliefs which have long since ceased to inspire, but are all-powerful instruments with which to torture and rack the mind. The living heroes and great men of the past are either deified or canonised, and the innate reverence of humanity for the past is degraded into the worship of innumerable deities, or the prostration of the soul before a host of images of the saints. It is not long before the worship is extended to the place in which they live and the clothes they wore. The holy shrine which marks the resting-place of some dead hero is thronged with pilgrims, while the forum and the temple, in which may be heard the living voice of the hero of the present, are deserted. While we refuse to worship the past, however, we must not be unmindful of the reverence which it rightly claims. Worship of the past may be a sign of debility, but irreverence is a mark of debasement. The abolition of the old may be imperatively demanded, but the abuse of the old is an insult to the dead. A response to the new may be the result of a holy impulse, but a sympathy with the old is a sacred duty.

The disciples of John the Baptist had come under the influence of a movement which was preparatory to a greater, had followed a leader who announced a mightier than himself. They had responded to the influence of the present, but

before they had well adapted themselves to the altered conditions, the new had become old, the authority had become obsolete, their leader was in captivity. They were followers of a thinker rather than thinkers themselves, partisans of a leader rather than participators in a movement. They had been carried by the flood-tide of the Baptist's ministry far away from their old moorings, and its ebb had left them high and dry. The new tide had not yet reached them, the old tide had long since receded. They looked back to the old moorings with wistfulness, they anticipated the coming tide with fear. There was much in the new teaching for which the Baptist had not prepared them; there was much in such of their old associations as he had left undisturbed to which they were deeply attached. He was in captivity, with little likelihood of being released. His movement was beheaded long before he himself was decapitated. His followers therefore, realising that the movement was at an end, felt themselves drawn towards the old, yet attracted to the new. They were conscious that they had more in common with the old, but they could not altogether resist the fascination of the new. They joined with the Pharisees on the question of fasting, but they insisted on an interview with Christ. Old associations drew them in the one direction; the personal influence of a leader, to which they had responded by following John, drew them to Jesus.

Great decisions often turn on slight events, and a commonplace occurrence often leads to an extraordinary result. The celebration of a common fast caused these men to see whither events were leading them, and made a decision long postponed a matter of urgency. They found themselves more in accord with the old than with the new ; they perceived a drifting of their bark in the direction of the shore they had left, rather than in the direction of the haven they had set out to find. Their difficulty in the matter of fasting was indicative of much more than the mere keeping of an old custom. It was symbolical of the attitude of their mind in its relation to the past, not merely indicative of their respect for an old habit. The solution they sought meant more than the mere resolution of a doubt, it meant the direction of their future life. They had, in fact, outgrown their old environment ; the new thought was fermenting in their minds. They were more at home among the disciples of the Pharisees than with the disciples of Jesus, but it is to the Master of the latter rather than to the Rabbis of the former that they feel drawn for a solution of their difficulty. They keep the fast with the Pharisees, but they cast longing eyes on the feast with the disciples of Jesus. The fast satisfies their religious scruples, but it is the feast which will alone satisfy their spiritual cravings. The reason for their own observance of the fast, however, is as much a

mystery to them as the reason for its non-observance by the followers of Jesus. "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples fast not?"

The question expresses the resentment which the mind instinctively feels at the presence of the new. It is always the new which has to justify its appearance, rather than the old which has to justify its continuance. It is the feast which the new offers, which first calls attention to the fast which the old enjoins. It is the new patch which produces dissatisfaction with the old garment; it is the new wine which reveals the inadequacy of the old wine-skin. The old custom may continue long after it has lost all meaning, but the moment it is questioned its hour of departure has struck.

Christ's answer is a justification of the new rather than a condemnation of the old. He calls attention to the altered environment which has produced the new, rather than points out the defects in the old. With the advent of the kingdom of heaven which John announced, the conception of religion has changed. It is no longer a mortification of the flesh, it is a life of the spirit. The mourning and lamentation at the supposed death of the maid have given place to the tabret and harp of the musicians who have come to take part in her marriage festivities. The religious instinct of the Jew was not dead, it only slept. The daughter of Zion had heard the

voice of the Bridegroom saying, "Talitha cumi," and the flush of new life had suffused her pale cheeks. The house, therefore, is no longer one of mourning but of rejoicing, and the fast must give place to the feast. The disciples are the children of the house to which the Bridegroom has come, and His presence makes fasting impossible. With the most sensitive regard for the feelings of John's disciples, and with a keen insight into their susceptibility to the influence of their old master, Christ takes up the illustration which John had himself used, and from the contrast he had drawn between himself as the herald and Christ as the King, justifies the contrast between the fasting on the part of the disciples of the one, and the feasting on the part of the disciples of the other. He also recognises, however, the different circumstances in which His questioners are placed through the imprisonment of their master, and anticipates a similar change of conditions for His own disciples. The time is coming when His own disciples, like those of John, will be bereft of their Master, and the time of feasting will have to give place to the time of fasting. Instead of discussing abstract principles He takes concrete facts, and suggests an explanation to account for the disappearance of the old and the birth of the new. He goes back to the common ground upon which both the new and the old alike rest. It is not ritual which evokes feeling, it is feeling which gives birth to

ritual. The outward act must be justified by its appropriateness as an expression of the inner feeling. When the sentiment has ceased to be active, the ceremony has ceased to be effective. When the outward act no longer represents the inner feeling, it has lost its significance and its performance is meaningless. Grief and sorrow will cause fasting, but mere fasting will never evoke a genuine sorrow. It is the spirit which must dictate the act, not the act which must control the spirit. A fast may be appropriate for a funeral, but it is the feast which is appropriate for the wedding.

The true difficulty, however, of John's disciples was not merely a question of ritual, it was a question of mental attitude. The old clothing to which they had grown accustomed showed signs of decay, and the pieces of new cloth with which they were trying to repair it, only made the rents worse. Their agreement with the Pharisees on the question of fasting, only revealed their disagreement on more serious matters. The sincerity which the preaching of John had evoked, had brought into greater prominence the hypocrisy of much of their religious life. He had provided them with new pieces of cloth, new words and phrases, but not with new clothing. The new wine which he had provided was cracking the old wine-skins of their Pharisaic training. The old conception of religion as ritual, which the Pharisees

had taught them, would not agree with the new conception of religion as righteousness which John had taught them. They had left their old moorings and they found a return impossible. Christ has the fullest sympathy for these disciples in the mental struggle through which they are passing, and His treatment of their difficulty is marked with the delicacy and tact of a refined nature. There is none of the ridicule in which a strong mind often indulges ; there is none of the scornful contempt which a coarse nature so frequently expresses. Their affection for the old is a feeling which He can understand ; their suspicion of the new is one with which He can sympathise. He lays emphasis on the fact that the old which has to be relinquished is merely the external, the old garments which have served their purpose, which were suited to the past, but are no longer a fitting expression for the thought of the present. The new thought which reveals the inadequacy of the old system is the vintage of the present, but reaped from the vineyards of the past. It is not the old truth, but the old expression in which it was clothed, which has to disappear. It is not the truth in the old system which is cast away, it is the old system which is not elastic enough to contain the new truth. A true loyalty to the past demands new clothing in which to express the old truth, the preparation of new wine-skins in which to preserve the vintage of the present. They show

the truest reverence for the past who seek to clothe the old truth in the new and living language of the present. They are the true conservatives who provide new wine-skins for the fresh vintage.

The last sentence, which Luke alone records, is suggestive of the intense sympathy Christ felt for the natural hesitation of John's disciples in the personal sacrifice they were called upon to make. The reformer, as a rule, has very little sympathy for the waverers and half-convinced. Strong in his own convictions, he can often understand an opponent better than the moderate man. Attracted by the new, he is rather repelled by the old. Christ, however, recognises that if personal inclination and individual taste were alone consulted, the new truth would invariably be lost. "No one," He says, "who has drunk old wine, relishes all at once the taste of the new, for he feels that the old is better." There is, however, a duty which the present demands, as well as an obligation which the past enjoins. We are stewards for the future as well as heirs of the past. The vineyard with its living plants and its vintage of to-day, as well as the cellar with its wine of the past, is a part of the inheritance which has come into our possession. We may drink the old wine, but we must also gather the fresh grapes. We may empty the old wine-skin, but we must replace it with the new, in which is carefully preserved the

fresh juice of the vintage of to-day. The estate we have inherited is strictly entailed, and we enjoy it as trustees for those who come after us. We must replace the worn-out furniture, we must restock the depleted cellars, if we are to fulfil the trust which has been committed to us, and hand on to our descendants a richer inheritance.

.VI

THE MAN WHOSE SUFFERING DEBASED HIM

John v. 1-18.

INDIVIDUALITY is a feature which can never be left out of consideration in dealing with any of the problems of life. Whether it be very marked or hardly noticeable, it is a factor which enters into every calculation, an element which affects every combination. The effects produced by the influence of education, environment, heredity, and creed, are all liable to modification by means of the individuality of the person subjected to them. Our calculations as to the influence of any one of these factors may be entirely upset by this subtle and incalculable personal element. The order and method even which may mark the individuality of one man affords no safe guide by which to estimate that of another man, for each has a certain definite quality which distinguishes him from his fellows. An environment which is beneficial to one man is positively harmful to another; an experience which is the making of one is the marring of

another character. One of the most striking illustrations of this essential difference between man and man is to be found in the very diverse results which are obtained from the ministry of suffering. The same sorrow may yield either a rich harvest of blessing, or a plentiful aftermath of curses, according to the individuality of the person to whom it comes. It leaves its mark upon every face, but one it may transfigure with a divine glory, while it may so disfigure another as to make it positively revolting. Similarly it may refine and purify a character, so that we instinctively reverence it as something godlike, or it may coarsen and harden it, so that we turn away with loathing. Whatever may be the view we take of the meaning and purpose of suffering, there can be no question that its effects are as diverse as light and darkness. Suffering is undoubtedly a great test of character, but it is a test which issues in either of two directions which are the antitheses of each other. The vase that is put into the furnace for completion may come out either perfect or spoiled, and it is almost impossible to foretell which result will be obtained. The man who passes through the furnace of suffering may come out with a character fixed in exquisite beauty, but it is apparently just as possible that he may come forth distorted and disfigured for life. Human nature differs as clays differ, and individuals, even of the same class, are as distinct as pottery made from the same clay.

The furnace tries them both, and the issue of the trial is equally uncertain.

The story of the impotent man at the Pool of Bethesda affords an illustration of a case in which suffering had debased rather than elevated the man who had been subjected to its ministry. From the solemn warning which Christ addresses to him after his healing, it seems pretty certain that in his case suffering was the direct result of a life of sin and degradation. In his early days he had probably sown his wild oats with the carelessness and prodigality which is characteristic of youth and inexperience. The crop quickly ripened, and the harvesting extended over thirty-eight years of the man's life. His early sin had apparently quickly found him out, and struck him down, leaving him a helpless paralytic for the rest of his days. Doubtless the calamity which had befallen him had produced an impression upon his mind and conscience in the earlier days of his trouble, but as far as can be judged this had long since passed away, and the continuance of the paralysis had deadened his moral as well as his physical nature. How long he had been a visitor to the healing springs of Bethesda we are not told, but simply that he had been in that condition for a very long period. There was evidently something about the man which arrested Christ's attention, and singled him out from the crowds of other sick people who were lying about. Probably the man had grown

so accustomed to his complaint that his desire for renewed health was not very great, and it is not at all improbable that he found it lucrative to appeal to the pity of the crowds who congregated there. The paralysis had affected the inner as well as the outer man, it had sapped his moral as well as his physical strength. It is not at all unlikely that it was the unmistakable look on the man's face denoting this moral paralysis which attracted Christ's attention, and aroused His compassion. Weakness of will is far more pitiable than weakness of body, and it is far more difficult to cure. The healing spring may suffice for physical debility, but a miracle is needed for the psychical infirmity. Christ stops before this wreck of what was once a man, and His question is directed to the moral rather than to the physical defect. "Do you wish," He asks, "to become sound both in body and mind?" On the surface the question is superfluous, for the man's presence at the Pool of Healing would seem to be a sufficient answer. Christ, however, looked beneath the surface, and there was that about the man which pointed to callousness and indifference. He needed a galvanic shock to rouse him from the torpor which thirty-eight years of impotence and the customary visit to the Pool had induced in his nature. The man's reply confirms this impression. "It is an excuse for his condition, not a reply to the question. He seems to feel that the question implies a doubt as

to the reality of his desire for healing. "Sir," he answers, "I have no one to put me into the Pool when the water is active, and while I am coming some one else steps down before me." There is the whine of the beggar rather than the reply of the sufferer in the man's answer. It is like the excuse which the professional tramp makes for his poverty. No one will give him work, and when he hears of a place, he finds another man has forestalled him. He does not even ask for the help which he confesses he needs, although the interest the stranger has shown in him would have justified the request. This throws considerable light upon his long waiting. It is not at all likely that among all the crowds who visited the place, no one could be found ready to give the helping hand he needed. It seems far more probable that he found it more profitable to remain in the Porch than to get inside the Pool, to appeal for alms than to seek for help. He was no great sufferer racked with pain, but merely crippled. Like so many Eastern cripples, he doubtless found begging and the exposure of his paralysed limbs a profitable business, and his visits to the Pool were to solicit charity rather than to seek healing. Christ appears to have felt this, for His answer is a command, "Rise, take up your mat and walk." What the man needed was a reinvigoration of the will, a strengthening of his moral nature, a life of activity, instead of the life of indolence to which

he had grown accustomed during those thirty-eight years. Suffering had bent him to the earth—he needed to stand erect. His mat had been spread for him to lie upon and beg—he needed to roll it up and carry it out of sight. He had been carried by others and been a burden to all who knew him—he needed to walk himself and learn to carry his own and other people's burdens. The inner man was paralysed as well as the outer man. Suffering had not elevated him—it had debased him. There are cases where the physical paralysis has quickened the life and activity of the soul, so that the bed-ridden cripple who has needed every physical attention has been the spiritual helper and inspirer of all who knew him. With this man, however, it had been the opposite. Suffering had soured him, and filled him with complaints and jealousies. No one would help him, others obtained relief before him. He preferred pity to relief, he would sooner lie and beg than walk and work. Christ seeks to rouse the moral life within him, and therefore adds to the command to rise, the order to take up his mat and walk. As long as his mat was there he might be tempted to lie down again. Unless he walked away, he might be tempted to wait till his friends or relatives came to carry him home. This, rather than any desire to bring about a controversy with the authorities on the question of Sabbath observance, is the reason for the command. That He should heal a man on the Sabbath is

perfectly natural, but that He should give such a trifling command as that to carry a mat in order to provoke a controversy is entirely artificial. Christ never avoided a controversy, but He never provoked one unnecessarily.

The healing accomplished, both Healer and healed depart their several ways, the One seeking to avoid notoriety, and the other too much astonished at his recovery to ask even the name of his benefactor. As he goes along the streets to his home, he is suddenly accosted by some of those strict Sabbatarians with whom Jerusalem abounded, and who were shocked at seeing a man carrying a burden on the Sabbath day. They expostulate with him on the enormity of his offence, and are astonished to find from his reply that a remarkable cure has been effected. The man's nature is evident in his reply to their reproof. He is a man ready with excuses, eager to throw his responsibilities upon others. He has not been cured hitherto because of the fault of others; he is carrying a burden now because the One who healed him told him to do it. There is doubtless no actual desire to bring his healer into trouble with the authorities, but there is equally no desire to shield his benefactor by taking responsibility for his action. The man is accustomed to finding excuses, and he has no difficulty in the present case. With that utter disregard of the important and emphasis of the trifling which is

characteristic of the mere literalist, the Pharisees ignore the healing, and eagerly fasten on the trifling act of carrying a mat on the Sabbath. "Who was the man who told you to take up your mat and walk?" They are not interested in the man who can say to the paralysed cripple, "Rise up and walk," but they will seek high and low for the man who dares to tell another to carry a burden on the Sabbath day. They can get no further information out of the man, for he does not know the name of the One who healed him. Having scented heresy, however, they start off in eager pursuit, leaving the man to himself.

We next find him in the Temple, and it is a matter of speculation what took him there. It seems more probable that he had gone to make a trespass offering for his unintentional breach of the Sabbath, than to suppose that he had gone to offer thanksgiving for his recovery. The words of the Pharisees would be likely to make a deeper impression upon a nature of his description than the words of Christ, and it is consequently far more probable that his visit to the temple was intended to free himself from the consequences of a sin, than that he went to offer thanks for a recovery of whose advantage he was growing more and more doubtful. Christ meets him in the Temple Courts, and, reading the man's nature, warns him against a repetition of the life of sin, which had brought so much suffering in its train.

“ See,” He says, “ you have been restored to health ; sin no more lest a worse evil overtake you.” The restored health has itself taken the man back to his early days, and already the old passions are stirring within him. He is afraid of what may happen to him for a breach of the Sabbath, and has hastened to the Temple to make his trespass offering. But he is oblivious of the sins of his early life, and unmindful of the lesson which thirty-eight years of suffering ought to have taught him. He is already considering to what haunt of vice he shall direct his steps after leaving the Temple, and there is a deeper flush than that of health upon his cheek, as his mind has already preceded him to the place. Like a spendthrift who has suddenly come into an unexpected fortune, he is eager to renew the pleasures which have so long been denied him. Suddenly Christ confronts him with the forgotten sins of the past, but linked to the present by those long years of suffering and helplessness. The bond has been severed, but beware lest a new one is made. Beware of the old habit and the old associations, lest an even worse fate befall you. The man’s health has been restored, but his nature has not been changed. He can now walk, but his steps are moving in the old direction, and his feet are swift to follow the old paths. His thirty-eight years of suffering are bad enough, but a worse fate is looming in the distance. ❧

The man makes no reply. He can neither deny the reference to the past, nor can he mistake the allusion to the present. He is one of those, however, to whom a warning is disagreeable; and who resent advice. In place of gratitude he feels dislike. He recognises his Healer in the Friend who warns him, and his mind instantly turns to the command to take up his mat, and the Pharisaic reproof to which it subjected him. Resentment for the warning against a return to the old life overcomes any feeling of gratitude for the restoration to health conferred, and he immediately goes off to the Pharisees to tell them the name of the Man whom they were anxious to persecute. A worse thing may or may not happen to himself, but he will pay off one score at least, and bring upon his Benefactor who has warned him the enmity and opposition of the authorities, and thereby possibly save himself. There is a meanness in the man's nature which neither suffering can eradicate nor benevolence overcome. There is a taint in the blood, which not even an elixir can remove. As a paralytic he will complain that no one will help him, and be jealous of the blessings others receive. As a miracle of healing himself, he will seek to shield himself at the expense of his Benefactor, and in resentment at a warning only too much needed, he will denounce to the authorities the Man who has saved him. He repays the solemn warning with petty spite, and

presents as his fee for healing, the nails which are to pierce the hands that have blessed him. "On this account the Jews began to persecute Jesus because He did these things on the Sabbath."

VII

THE RITUALISTS

Matthew xv. 1-20 ; Mark vii. 1-23.

THERE are some men whose influence is in inverse proportion to the intrinsic merit both of themselves and of their opinions. Attention has to be directed towards them, not on account of what they are in themselves, but solely on account of the fungus growth which they encourage. In themselves they call for no more notice than the passing glance; their opinions are intrinsically worthless, yet the influence they wield compels the most careful attention, and the effort to counteract it demands the most strenuous exertion. The explanation of this anomaly is to be found in the abnormal power they possess for exaggeration and distortion, by virtue of which they are able to make the trifling appear the serious, and the serious the trifling. Their mental perspective is the exact reverse of the normal. They see the remote as near, the near as remote, the great appears small and the small great. They make mountains out of mole-hills, and

scrupulously strain out the gnat while they swallow the camel. If they were mere amateur painters, the lack of normal perspective would be comparatively harmless, but, unfortunately, they generally set up as professional artists, and seek to control the public Galleries. If their opinions were mere private beliefs they would be innocuous, but as a rule they are the dogmas of a propaganda and dangerous to the community. They offer themselves as guides to the blind, and as physicians to the sick; hence it is as public men and not as private individuals that they must be regarded. That which is mere delusion in the latter is fraud in the former.

In the sphere of religion such men find a wide and fruitful field for their activities. In no branch of human knowledge is mental perspective more important, and in none is defective vision so pernicious. Everything is capable of being looked at from two very different standpoints, the human and the divine. That which is near to the one is remote to the other, that which is great to the one is small to the other. The impressions of sight need correcting by means of the intuitions of insight. When the unseen is visualised, it is essential that the material medium be spiritualised. It is here that the perils of ceremonial manifest themselves. Ritual is the attempt to materialise the intangible, to manifest the imperceptible. The spiritual feeling, therefore, must be of the finest,

and the spiritual vision of the keenest, or it degenerates into the grossest materialism. If there is no spiritual insight in the one who celebrates the rite, the celebration is a mere performance; if there is no perception of the spiritual in the minds of those who look on, the ceremony is a mere spectacle. The ritual of religion, therefore, offers a rich soil in which the poisonous fungus of the unreal flourishes and spreads. The lack of a true perspective is fatal; an inaccurate sense of proportion is disastrous. That which is nearest to the senses is the most remote from the soul; that which is most striking to the eye is of least importance, while that which to sight is the great, is to insight the least. The man, therefore, who perceives only the medium through which the intangible is materialised, has sight but not insight. He sees everything out of the true perspective, exaggerates the trifling into the serious, mistakes the material for the spiritual, and substitutes the form for the substance. If the rite were always the expression of the spiritual feeling which instituted it, the danger would be reduced to a minimum, but, unfortunately, the origin of the rite is in the dim past. The feeling may long since have passed away but the rite remains, and, separated from the sentiment which gave it life, it is a body without a soul, material and not spiritual. It carries with it no innate authority but rests upon the traditions of the past. In the sphere of

religion, therefore, the tendency of ritualism is to place the emphasis not on the response of the soul to the spiritual influences by which it is surrounded, but on the due observance of the ceremonies which a past generation has handed down. It is an attempt to resuscitate the dead, to bring back the life that has passed away, by galvanising the corpse. While in practice it is allied to the Pharisees, in belief it is allied to the Sadducees. It maintains that there is no resurrection nor angel nor spirit. It fails, that is, to see that the life which has passed away cannot be resuscitated—it must rise from the dead and take on a new body. It fails to see that the religious life of the present cannot be controlled by the traditions of the past, but must be a response to the direction of the Angel of the Covenant. It forgets that the spirit and not the body is the permanent and abiding factor in the religious life.

Opinions and beliefs which in the private individual merely arouse pity, when found in the public teacher and leader arouse indignation. We feel that the man is not merely blind—he is a blind guide. He is not only risking his own life, he is imperilling the lives of his followers. His conceits may in themselves be contemptuous, but as deceptions practised upon the masses they are criminal. This is the explanation of that scathing denunciation which Christ pronounced upon the Pharisees of His day, and the important place

the exposure of their teaching occupied in His public ministry. Blind themselves to the spiritual, they professed to be the spiritual leaders of the nation ; their opinions, puerile in themselves, were received as the authoritative utterances of the wise. Conflict was inevitable and He never shirked it. He necessarily laid Himself open to constant attack, and they never missed an opportunity. At the beginning, He merely offended their taste and excited their desire for controversy, but as they became more acquainted with the principles He enunciated, distaste deepened into bitter hatred, and conspiracy took the place of controversy.

The party of Scribes and Pharisees from Jerusalem who waited upon Him as He stepped ashore from the Lake of Gennesaret were men whose religious feelings had been offended by the action of His disciples in sitting down to their meal without first performing the religious ceremony of washing their hands. It was not a question of manners, it was one of ritual. It was not a question of eating with clean instead of unclean hands, it was a question of the non-observance of a religious ceremony. It was not a breach of etiquette, it was a transgression against religious authority. "Why do your disciples transgress the tradition of the Elders, in not purifying their hands before meals?" They do not ask a question, they administer a rebuke. They are not puzzled, they are shocked. They do not

appeal for a justification, they demand an emphatic condemnation. Their faces are flushed with indignation, their brows are contracted with severity. The disciples themselves are overwhelmed with confusion, and hang their heads to conceal their shame.

There is a flush on the face of Christ as He turns to reply, but it is not from shame at His disciples, but with indignation at their accusers. There is the glint of steel in the flash of His eye as He confronts them with the retort, "Why do you too transgress the commandments of God on account of this very tradition of yours? For God said, Honour thy father and thy mother, and again, Let him who reviles father or mother be certainly put to death; but as for you with your traditions, this is what you say:—If a man declares about anything of which his parents stand in the sorest need, that it is consecrated, he is absolved from the commandment to honour his father and mother, and in this way you have actually cancelled the command of God for the sake of your tradition. You hypocrites! aptly did Isaiah describe you in anticipation when he wrote—"This is a people who honour me with their lips, while their heart is far away from me; they worship me to no purpose while they offer as teaching, forsooth, mere human precepts." The retort is overwhelming, but it is richly deserved. It is no mere *Tu quoque* reply to a charge, it is the triumphant acquittal of the accused by means of the conviction of the accuser.

The charge of pilfering is based upon an interpretation of the law which proves that the prosecutor has all his life been living by highway robbery. These men who are so particular about washing their hands before sitting down to a meal can be guilty of parricide. Their mental perspective is so abnormal that the performance of a religious rite must take precedence over the discharge of the plainest natural duty. They will allow the utterance of a word to absolve a man from the obligations of a lifetime. They are shocked at the disciples for the omission to wash their hands before taking their food, but they smile approval on the man who, in order to discharge a selfish vow, outrages every natural instinct and cancels the command of God. They are sitting on the judge's bench, when they should be standing in the prisoner's dock. This is no question of the interpretation of a law of Moses, it is the abrogation of a command of God, and the substitution of the figment of the diseased imagination of some egotistical Rabbi. It is not a question of mere difference of opinion, it is the divergence of principles which are as far asunder as the poles. These men are not critics, but hypocrites; they are not blind, but blindfolded; they are not seeking guidance, but are professing to guide. The position they occupy invests their opinions with a moral significance. Their folly is vicious, their mistake criminal.

Turning from the discomfited Scribes and Pharisees, He addresses the people, upon whose faces, as well as upon those of His disciples, astonishment is plainly depicted. 'They can to a certain extent appreciate the positive in His teaching, and welcome His vindication of the commandments. They cannot, however, understand His defence of a breach of ritual of which they are self-conscious. "Listen to me all of you," He says, "and try and understand. There is nothing external to a man which by getting inside his body can defile the man. It is the things which are internal, and which come out of the man, which defile him." A true mental perspective distinguishes between the essential and the non-essential, between the external act and the internal spirit. It is neither the ceremony which can produce true purity nor the omission of the ceremony which can produce impurity. The ceremony is external to the man; purity and impurity are something internal, in the mind and not in the body. It is the impure heart and not the unclean hands which defile the man.

After the crowd has dispersed, and the Master and His disciples are in the privacy of the house, the disciples, who have apparently been turning the matter over in their minds, trying to understand but failing, refer to the subject again. "Do you not know," they ask Him, "that the Pharisees were greatly shocked when they heard what you

said ?” They are themselves so conscious of their breach of the traditions, that they are afraid He has said more than He intended in His generous defence of themselves. The teaching of the Pharisees is too deeply planted within them to be easily uprooted. They feel that they were at fault in not performing the ceremony, and that it would perhaps have been wiser if He had acknowledged it.

Christ sees the weed which Pharisaic teaching and training has planted within their minds, and realises that they will find it difficult to pull it up. “Every plant which my Heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up,” He answers. The merely human precepts which the Pharisees have substituted for the true teaching which they ought to have imparted will be uprooted as noxious weeds. As for their being shocked, “Let them alone,” He adds, “they are not worth considering. They are blind guides leading along blind men, and according to the proverb, if the blind lead the blind, they will both fall into the pit, so it will be with them and those who follow them.”

Peter suddenly interrupts the conversation. He has been going over the answer of Christ, and trying to find out what was meant by the inner which defiles and the outer which does not defile, and he can make nothing of it. Suddenly the proverb which Christ mentions gives him an idea. Perhaps it is a parable, and the words are figures

of speech. He has often mistaken the parabolic for the literal, now he mistakes the literal for the parabolic. "Explain to us," he exclaims, "this *parable*."

Christ has no difficulty in understanding the reference. He sees at once the reason for Peter's perplexed look. Pharisaic mystification has made it impossible for Peter to understand a plain statement. He is so convinced of the reality of ceremonial impurity, that he cannot grasp the plainest statement of what real impurity actually is. "Are even you, my own disciples, still lacking in perception?" Christ asks. "Do you not see that what I said was no parable, but literal fact? The mouth gives admission to the material only, and the food can affect the body merely. The words, however, which come out of the mouth issue from the heart, and reveal its inner thoughts and desires. These are the things that defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, perjury, and blasphemy. These, and not the mere omission of a ceremony, are the things which defile." It is not a question of purity *versus* impurity, or of the relative importance of different ceremonies. It is a question of fact as against fiction, of reality as against sham, which divides Him from the Pharisees, His teaching from their traditions. The appeal is not to the dicta of dead Rabbis, but to the living voice of reason and conscience. The fatal error of mere

ceremonialism is in the emphasis it lays upon the external, and in its utter lack of a true perspective. The more logically its system is worked out, the more irrational do its conclusions appear. Like a parasite, it flourishes at the expense of the life which nourishes it. It destroys the religion which has sustained it, and petrifies the heart which has cherished it.

VIII

THE SOCIAL PROBLEM

Luke xii. 1-21.

THE inequalities of life have ever been a subject of deep human interest. The affluence of the rich in comparison with the grinding poverty of the poor has presented its striking contrast to every age, and offered its perplexing problem to every generation. The problem is too real to be ignored ; its voice is too clamant to be unheeded. It forces itself into the study of the philosopher, it walks unannounced into the office of the merchant, it interviews the statesman, and pushes its way into the Church. The problem appeals to the reason no less than to the emotions. We are impressed with the irrational as well as with the pathetic in it, and it enlists the head no less than the heart in the attempt at a solution. It cries for justice as well as begs for charity. The question of social reform finds advocates in every rank of life, and draws its supporters from men and women of every shade of opinion. The peer rubs shoulders

with the peasant, theologian with scientist, statesman with demagogue, Christian with agnostic, and pessimist with optimist. It has a wonderful power of absorbing the attention, so that to some it is the only political question, to others it is the only science, and to others again it is the only religion. The solutions offered are as diverse as the advocates are varied. The panaceas discovered are as numerous as they are ineffective. There is, however, one remarkable uniformity amidst all the variety, one point of agreement amidst all the differences of opinion. Almost without exception every solution involves an appeal to some external authority, whose power is to be invoked to rectify what is wrong. If the evil is regarded as the effect of bad legislation, the remedy is to be found in good legislation. If it is the result of the power of the classes, the remedy is to be found in arousing the dormant power of the masses. The efficacy of the remedies is proportionate to the accuracy of the diagnosis. The real question to be first settled is the accuracy of the diagnosis; for a blister to the skin is no remedy for a disease which is in the blood. If the disease is in human nature and not in its environment, legislation may to some extent relieve the pain, but it cannot remedy the evil. Strict equity demands that the case of the poor against the rich shall be set side by side with the case of the rich against the poor. The right of the one

to obtain must not conflict with the equal right of the other to retain. It is right that Law should remove the evil Law has produced, but it is impossible for Law to remove the pains and penalties which Nature has imposed. These are in a province beyond its jurisdiction. If relief is to be sought from these, the alteration must be effected in the courts of the higher tribunal. Human legislation is but the executive of human nature, and it cannot be in advance of the measures which the latter enjoins. It is the High Court of Parliament and not the executive which can alter the constitution. It is not to a new executive, but to a reformed Parliament that the redress of grievances must be submitted. The evil complained of is not so much in bad legislation as in a corrupt human nature. Relief must be sought, therefore, not in a mere alteration of the environment, but in amending the constitution; not in repealing old laws or enacting new ones, so much as in reforming human nature and ennobling it. The difference between a religious and a non-religious social reformer is to be found not in any indifference on the part of the one, or in any extra sensitiveness on the part of the other, but in the different diagnosis of the disease. The one attributes it to the constitution, the other to the environment; and as a consequence the one seeks to make men, while the other seeks to make laws. The difference in the diagnosis is sure to lead to

the disapproval by the one of the treatment of the other. Misunderstanding and friction are inevitable, but it would be well if both recognised that their aims are one, and gave each other credit for equal sincerity.

The attitude of Christ to this question of social reform has been very differently interpreted. The non-religious party have both claimed and repudiated Him. The religious party have both claimed and misrepresented Him. His sympathy cannot be questioned, for His life was spent amongst the poor. His attitude, however, must be decided by the sentiments He expressed and the principles He enunciated. His interview with the aggrieved brother who came to solicit His assistance in securing his inheritance is very suggestive of His attitude to the question of social reform. From the account in the Gospel of Luke, where alone the incident is recorded, it would appear that He was in the middle of a discourse to a vast company of people, who, in their eagerness to hear what He had to say, were exhibiting all the selfishness of a great crowd. The discourse began with a reference to the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, which, though carefully concealed, would at length be exposed. Recognising the friendly character of His audience, He speaks to them freely, encouraging them not to be afraid of men, since they are in the keeping of God, the Divine Father. If they are brought

before the authorities, whether civil or religious, they need have no anxiety as to their defence, for the Holy Spirit will teach them to suit the word to the occasion. One man in the crowd hears but is not listening. His mind is occupied with a concern which is all-absorbing. He is one of the great unemployed, and has drifted with the crowds who are streaming to listen to the Prophet of Nazareth. His brother has withheld the share of the inheritance which he considers to be due to him, and the injustice rankles in his breast. A word here and there arrests his attention, as it fits in with the one subject which is always occupying his mind. The hypocrisy which is denounced fitly represents his brother's conduct, and the declaration that the thing which has been done in secret shall be exposed openly, gives him a momentary feeling of pleasure as he thinks of his brother's secret injustice. The reference to being brought before magistrates and rulers suddenly quickens his interest in the preacher, and the promise of the gift of speech which will enable a man to say the right thing at the right moment makes him elbow his way through the crowd, and interrupt the discourse with the request for assistance in prosecuting his case against his brother. Like a would-be litigant hanging around a law court, he thinks he has found the advocate he needs. Here is one who can speak fearlessly, can say just what ought to be said, and say it at

the right time and with the right feeling. If this man will only undertake his case, it is practically won. Absorbed with the importance of his own grievance, he is oblivious to everything else. "Ho! Preacher," he cries out, "tell my brother to give me my share of the inheritance." There is a fierceness in the man's tones which indicates suppressed passion. There is an abruptness in the address which reveals his self-absorption. He is unconscious of the thousand eyes which are turned in his direction, he is oblivious to the interruption he has caused. He is typical of a mighty and impatient host, and his fierce appeal against a brother's injustice is representative of the passionate demand for a share in the world's wealth, which the poor make, of the rich. There is the same sense of urgency, the same indifference to every other question. What is the use of talking about the spiritual when the material is so pressing? Why speak about the hypocrisy of the Pharisee when it is the greed of the brother which calls for denunciation? If religion is to be of any practical value, let it busy itself with righting crying wrongs, and reinstating the disinherited. Let the preacher descend from the pulpit and settle the dispute between capital and labour, inherent rights and vested interests. Leave the crowds who have merely come to listen to a preacher, and go and speak to the brother who has usurped the inheritance. From the individual man's point of

view there is reason in his demand, and justification for his impatience. To him nothing is of importance as long as his brother is left in undisturbed possession of the inheritance he has usurped. A single word to the brother is worth more than the Sermon on the Mount ; the righting of his wrong is of more value than the Magna Charta of Christendom.

It is not the interruption which Christ resents, it is the man's selfish absorption which he reproves. It is not the man's view of his case, but the man's view of life which he condemns. "Man," He answers, "who has made me a judge or divider over you?" The title is a reminder that the man is a unit, his case is one among millions of similar ones. It turns his attention to the thronging crowds who have an equal right to be heard, and as important claims upon Christ's attention. What to the individual may be of supreme concern, may to the race be of little moment. The man has to learn that there are others in the world beside himself and his brother, and that there are greater interests in life than the division of property. The tone is necessarily severe, but the man's self-absorption has demanded it ; his wrong is to a certain extent treated with unconcern, but his over-emphasis has necessitated it. We are all too much inclined to think that the world must be stopped while our grievance is attended to, and that the Almighty Himself must intervene to decide the case in our

favour. Christ declines, and that deliberately, to exchange the position of preacher for that of arbitrator. There is no contempt in His refusal, but there is that high conception of the supreme importance of His mission of which mere contempt is the shadow and not the substance. There is no mistaking the meaning of His refusal. In His conception the preacher towers above statesman and judge, legislator and lawyer. The reformation of human nature takes precedence over every other reform. A superficial view of life may invest the champion of oppression and the redresser of wrongs with a greater glory than that which it accords to the teacher ; but a true insight into the significance of life will recognise that the teacher's work is more radical, has a more potent influence and a more far-reaching effect. For one wrong which the redresser may set right, there are a thousand which the teacher may prevent. The champion of oppression in denouncing a single wrong may stir up a dozen evil passions to produce their own harvest of injustice, while the teacher may instil a principle rich in gracious influence and potent in blessing to thousands of lives. The beatitudes which Christ uttered on the Mount have had a more potent influence on human life than the legislation which proceeded from that other Mount, all ablaze with fire, shrouded in gloom and tempest, and resounding with the blast of trumpet and the sound of words. The platform may be more

popular than the pulpit, but the pulpit will always be more potent for good than the platform.

The aggrieved brother retired, probably to add to his other grievances resentment against the preacher who declined to interfere in his quarrel. He has accomplished nothing for himself, but unconsciously much for others. He has brought forward a bigger problem than a mere dispute between himself and his brother, about their respective share of the family inheritance. He has raised the social problem, and though Christ will have nothing to do with the private quarrel, He has much to say on the larger question. The preacher may refuse to take sides in private disputes, but he must take a stand on public questions. He is the teacher of all, and therefore he can be the partisan of none. He has the charge of souls, and therefore his office must never be a sinecure. From the man, Christ turns to the many; from the petty wrong He turns to the public evil. "Keep a good look-out and a strict guard," He says, "against every kind of avarice—that disposition to take more than your right share, which is the root of the social problem. For no man's life depends upon the extent of his property, or the amount of his possessions." This is no hit at the man who has left, which would be as ungenerous as it would be unjust. He has distinctly refused to be a judge in the dispute, and it is unjust both to the aggrieved brother and to Christ to

suppose that he is here reproved for avarice. There is, in fact, an absurdity in supposing that the man who has been deprived of his share of the family inheritance is rebuked for avarice in asking for the portion that belonged to him. If any one was open to the charge, it was the brother who was in possession, rather than the brother who was turned out. Christ's reference, however, is general and not particular. He deals with the problem of which the particular case was but an illustration. The social problem is not a question of adjustment of differences, or of arbitration between disputants, it has much deeper roots, which are embedded in human nature. The disease is not a simple eruption of the skin, it is a poison in the blood. It is not a mistaken conception of the relation between capital and labour, employer and employed, it is a mistaken conception of life. At the root of the social problem is a radical misconception as to what constitutes real wealth, and of what is involved in true living. Wealth is a word whose root is in the moral and not in the material classification of thoughts. It denotes quality rather than quantity, refers to what a man is rather than to what he has, signifies the value of a man's life rather than the amount he leaves behind. The current coin of thought has been debased, and the true prosperity of the race has suffered in consequence. Man has substituted goods for good, riches for rich, price for value, real estate for real condition,

effects for effect. Instead of speaking about the good a man has done, we call attention to his goods; in place of fixing the gaze upon the richness of a man's life, we speak of his riches; instead of inquiring the value of a man's labour, we ask what is the market price. We have turned the clear limpid stream which rises in the heights of man's moral nature, and sets the seal of nobility upon him, namely, the desire for a richer and fuller life, into the turbid, foul-smelling and poisonous town river of avarice—the feverish desire to grasp and hold lands and riches and possessions. It is this degradation of the true conception of life which is at the root of the social problem. Christ confronts it with His emphatic and authoritative, No. A man's life does *not* consist, universal opinion notwithstanding, in the abundance of his possessions. The life is more than meat as the body is more than clothing. Christ refused to act as arbitrator, He abstained from proclaiming any scheme of social reformation, but in placing the emphasis on life rather than on riches, on what a man *is* rather than on what he *has*, He has done more for the regeneration of the world, and the reconstruction of a true social order, than can possibly be effected by the most perfect system of social reform. He has kindled an enthusiasm for humanity, without which no reform is possible, He has inspired a sense of human brotherhood apart from which a

true social order is unattainable, He has given a new meaning to human life, such as we seek in vain apart from His influence. He contemplated a greater end than the reformation of society, He sought the regeneration of the race.

IX

THE WOMAN WHO WOULD NOT BE DENIED

Matt. xv. 21-28 ; Mark vii. 24-30.

THE underlying note in a good deal of our modern literature dealing with the problem of life is pessimistic. It is the acknowledgment that the mystery of existence is past finding out, the riddle which the Sphinx propounds is not worth the attempt at finding an answer. The enthusiasms and visions of early life have been replaced with the doubts and actualities of experience, and the apparent inutility of all the strife and effort, the disillusionments and disappointments fill us with an unutterable sense of the vanity and worthlessness of it all; which finds expression in the constantly recurring question, *Cui bono?* What is the meaning of the vain show, the painted scenery and the masks and dresses in which humanity parades across the stage, mumbles its part and makes its gestures, ere the curtain drops and the lights are turned out? Has it indeed any meaning at all? To some life is a gay comedy, while to others it is

a grim tragedy, but of what advantage is either the humour of the one or the pathos of the other? Is the pleasure worth the having, is the pathos worth the feeling? After all is the play, whether comedy or tragedy, worth the money we have to pay for it, is it even worth paying anything at all? Nay, is the complimentary ticket even worth taking? We have lost interest even in the discussion of the question as to whether pain is in excess of pleasure or pleasure in excess of pain. What does it matter which; the one is as insipid as the other is sour. The whole of life is just a clash of atoms in a chaos, out of which something of the nature of a cosmos may perchance come, but at present only chaos is visible.

Perhaps one of the chief causes of this modern pessimism is the undue emphasis which the spirit of the age has placed on the intrinsic value of mere things. We are accustomed to ask the price of most articles with which we have to deal, and have consequently gained the habit of a quick decision as to whether we think they are worth the money. In our trade we are careful to make things look the value we ask for them. In our scientific pursuits we are always trying to find out the utility of our discoveries, and attach the utmost importance to those which have what we call a marketable value. In literature we first ask whether a work is likely to sell, and only secondarily whether it is of value. The news-

paper that has the largest circulation, and the novel which has run to the most editions are the things we prize, and of whose value we seem assured. The result is that we apply the same standard to our views of life. Its value must be on the surface and self-evident. The answer to the problem must appeal to this business instinct which judges in a moment, telegraphs its decision, and delivers its order while the messenger waits.

We are apt to forget that the truly valuable is always the *priceless*. Our weights and measures and current coins are inapplicable to the real treasures of the world. Their value is not so much in themselves as in the effects they produce. The value of a work of art is not in the cost of the materials, nor even in the price that has been paid for it, but in the emotions it excites and the influence it can exert. The true value of the possession of it is not in the addition it makes to our collection, but in what it is able to extract from us ourselves. It must be judged, therefore, not by what it is intrinsically, but by what it accomplishes in the sphere of the spiritual as distinct from the material. A true conception of life similarly passes by the intrinsic, and fastens on the extrinsic. Life is an education, and its value is not in what we succeed in getting out of it, but rather in what it succeeds in getting out of us. The answer to the question, Is life worth living, cannot be obtained by a debit and credit account

of pain and pleasure, the interesting and the uninteresting, it is obtained by an estimate of the value of the character that has been formed. Events must not be judged by what they are in themselves, but by the effects which they are able to produce. The world is a school rather than a stage, and life is an education rather than a piece of acting. We are not Bohemian actors who can throw up an engagement if the part we are cast for is not to our liking, but we are scholars who have to learn our lessons and pass or fail in our examinations. It is the after-life which justifies, or condemns the education we have received at school, and of that as long as we are scholars we have no means of judging. Those who sent us are responsible, and we must trust to the wisdom of their choice. The sooner we settle down to our lessons, and leave off both our discussions and our grumbling, the better it will be for us.

The interview between Christ and the Syro-phœnician woman affords a striking illustration of the higher importance Christ attached to His power to teach as contrasted with the more sensational power which He possessed of working miracles. His philosophy of life was evidently based upon the belief that what could be drawn out of any one was of far greater value than what could be bestowed upon them. His treatment of the woman, which is so unlike what we should have anticipated, must be judged in the light of

the corresponding fact that the woman is herself totally unlike anything we should have expected. She was not a Jewess, but a Gentile by birth, yet her character is that of a devout Israelite rather than that of an unbelieving Gentile. Christ is in the parts of Tyre and Sidon, outside the limits of Jewish territory, yet, as in the case of the Roman centurion, so in that of this woman, He finds more faith than even in Israel. Such an impression did His contact with the Gentile world produce, that in His subsequent ministry He contrasts the cities in which the greater part of His ministry was spent with the Tyre and Sidon of this short and apparently only journey thither. He had probably gone over the border to seek a temporary retirement from the strain to which His Galilean ministry exposed Him. He was seeking a much-needed rest, and across the border was a foreign country and a Gentile people, amongst whom He might reasonably expect to find the retirement and rest He sought. His fame, however, had preceded Him, and the quiet of His journey was disturbed by a cry for help from this Syrophœnician woman. She had a little daughter in her home, suffering from one of those mysterious nervous maladies which were associated with the possession of a devil. Her life was clouded by this great sorrow. The origin of the disease was unknown, and after the manner of her people and her time, she attributed it to some malign influence whom she had

unwittingly offended. Though the nature and the cause of the trouble were alike unknown, it was the great shadow in her home, and must have had its influence upon her character. Day by day she was face to face with one of life's insoluble enigmas. Hour by hour she had to watch the paroxysms of her child, and feel her utter helplessness either to understand or to relieve. She must again and again have asked what was the meaning of it all, and how it would end, yet her mother's heart of love sustained her, and her ministration never failed. Vague rumours had probably reached her of the wonder-worker in Galilee, and of the cures He had been able to effect. But Galilee was a long way off, and her child demanded all her attention. At length report was brought that the Great Healer had crossed the border, entered her own district, and was passing within a short distance of her home. Here was the opportunity of a lifetime, and she started off full of hope to obtain the help for herself and her child of which she stood so much in need. She meets Him as He passes along surrounded with His disciples, and cries out, "Sir, Son of David, pity me; my daughter is cruelly harassed with a devil."

The Messianic title by which she addresses Him is one which she has picked up; and she probably thinks that its use will be more likely to make Him take notice of her and be favourable

to her request. She was unfortunate, however, in her choice. Christ has just left Galilee, where day by day the same cry has resounded in His ears, and the same appeal to work—a marvel has met Him at every place He has visited. He had given the Galileans His best both of teaching and working, but the response He longed for has not been forthcoming. They would call Him by the Messianic title if they could get anything out of Him, but they would not respond to the higher life and the spiritual truth He had to offer them. He had therefore withdrawn from their midst, that the mere wonders which they demanded to see might be kept in the background, and the teaching He had imparted might have a chance of influencing them. He had made use of the material to illustrate the spiritual, and found that they were too interested in the pictures to attend to the lesson. He had given them the best that was in Him, that He might draw out the best that was in them, and He found that they took all and gave nothing. Here, in the retirement He sought, the same cry for the miraculous meets Him again. The same demand for the marvellous is made to Him, the same title is addressed to Him. He has disregarded it in Galilee, He has withdrawn to avoid it, and when He meets it here, He answers it with silence. He is no mere wonder-worker, He is a teacher, and to draw out the best that is in men is, in His view of life, of

greater value than to grant the relief they are so ready to demand.

The woman's sense of helplessness, however, is too keen to take silence for refusal, and she follows Him with that persistence and importunity characteristic of the Eastern nature. The disciples, who are aware of the object of their journey, remind Him that the woman is defeating His purpose by exciting that very attention He sought to avoid, and suggest that He should send her away. Her monotonous cry is like the bleating of some ewe who has lost her lamb, and suggests the metaphor Christ uses in His reply. Turning to the woman He answers, "I have no commission save to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." It is a reply called forth by the Messianic title she has used, and is intended to call her attention to the meaning of the words she has caught up and is using without realising their significance.* If He is, as she says, the Jewish Messiah, He has no commission for Tyre and Sidon, and she has no claim upon His assistance. Her prayer is the expression of a real need, but her words are meaningless. She has asked for a simple boon, He has a richer blessing in store for her. She wants help for her daughter, He has something for herself as well.

She is quick to understand that she has made some mistake in the form of the request she has

preferred, but she reads His face too accurately to mistake delay for dismissal. She falls at His feet, and it is the natural woman who utters the simple but all-powerful prayer, "Sir, help me." She has dropped all meaningless titles, and all unnecessary expressions. She is helpless, He is the Helper; she is poor, He is rich. She knows nothing about His commission, she is ignorant of the meaning of His title, but she recognises a heart of compassion, and to that she makes her appeal.

Christ's heart is touched by the woman's naturalness and sincerity. He sees the mother-heart, with its yearning desire for some help for the little sufferer at home, and His compassion is stirred. Here is some one very different from the mere seeker after a sign, here is something deeper than the mere desire for the marvellous. There is a half-playful smile on His face, but the eyes are wells of compassion as He answers, "It is not allowable to take the bread from the children, and throw it to the dogs on the floor." He is speaking to a mother who is accustomed to give little delicacies to her sick child, and who can therefore appreciate the simile. Her mother's heart will fasten upon the children whose bread is to be taken away, not on the dogs who are waiting round the table. She will institute no comparison of contempt, nor take umbrage at the reference to dogs. Hers is a nature which is

quick to respond, a mind which it is a pleasure to draw out.

Even Christ Himself is astonished at her reply. The vein of ore which He perceived is richer than even He supposed. He has appealed to her mother-heart as to whether the boon which she asks for her child can be fairly given, and with the quick wit of a keen mind, and the accurate vibration of a sympathetic spirit, she responds with an answer which secured the admiration of Christ, and the applause of the world. "True, Sir, it is not allowable, as you say; still, help me, for even the dogs eat the scraps which fall from their masters' table." He may be the Jewish Messiah, as she has heard, His commission may be only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, it may not be right to deprive the children of their bread, but she sees a wider sympathy than that of race in the eyes which look into hers, and a wealth of power more than sufficient for Israel's needs in the hands which hover in blessing above her head as she kneels at His feet. There are crumbs which fall from the bountiful table He has spread, and one is sufficient for her need.

Her education has been completed, and He has brought out of her a treasure which has surprised even Himself. The discipline of life has matured a character which is worth all that has been spent on its education. Those days of anxiety and those nights of watching by the bed-

side of her suffering child have not been meaningless, any more than the silence and reluctance with which Christ greeted her appeal for help have been fruitless. The spirit which the former has evoked is as rich and precious as the saying which the latter has called forth. The trial of her life has fulfilled its purpose, and the time for its removal has arrived. The silence and reluctance have called forth this wonderful saying of hers, and the time for granting her request has come. "For the sake of that saying," He answers, "you can go home, the demon has gone out of your child."

"For the sake of that saying." Yes, it was worth coming into the regions of Tyre and Sidon. To have evoked it was worth the silence and the feigned reluctance in granting her request. She was herself the richer for it, and she has enriched the world with it. And yet, but for the silence and the reluctance she would never have brought forth the best that was in her. So with that apparently useless and unintelligible trial to which she had been subjected. It had, after all, made her the woman she was. The saying had but revealed the fact. For the sake of that *thought*, for the sake of that *sentiment*, for the sake of that *spirit*, how much may be endured, and how long it may be worth our while to wait. The experience of life must be judged not by the terms in which it may be accurately described, but by the very

different terms in which it must be summed up. Failure may accurately describe a man's actions, while success is the true summing up of his life. The travail of a soul may characterise a 'life' history, while the birth of a hero may be 'the truer appreciation of the result. Life must not be judged by its Lent, but by its Easter.

X

AN UNEXPECTED DAY OF JUDGMENT

John viii. 2-11.

CHASTITY is a divinity whom men admire, but whom women worship. Her admirers secure respect, but her worshippers reverence. The violation of her shrine on the part of man is robbery, on the part of woman it is sacrilege. In strict equity there is no difference between the two; in the domain of sentiment, however, robbery is more venial than sacrilege. The difference in the sentiment felt is due to the reflex action of the feeling inspired. The man's attitude never produces a deeper impression than that of sincere appreciation, the woman's instinctively reminds us of the holy reverence of a devotee. Chastity in a woman evokes a deeper feeling, and as the result unchastity calls forth a deeper resentment. The higher the position the deeper the fall. While this is probably the explanation of the feeling with which a woman's fall is regarded, it is no justification for the unequal treatment which is meted out.

The sin in woman is more often due to frailty than to positive vice, to a weak will than to a strong passion. In the man it is the result of a vicious disposition, the effect of an unbridled passion. Society, however, invariably brings the woman to the judgment bar, and allows the man to go free. At frailty and weakness it is ever ready to cast the stone, while it allows brutality and vice to pass along with unblushing effrontery. It treats shame with contempt, but impudence with respect. It forgets that the woman's fall is always the result of the man's failure. If manhood were never debased, womanhood would never be disgraced. Yet the debased man is tolerated, while the disgraced woman is reprobated. There is immunity for the one, but not even forgiveness for the other. The man who has failed can compound with his creditors, the woman whose fall is the result of his failure is ruined for life. The man's failure is unfortunate, but the woman's fall is criminal. Society will not order even the prosecution of the one, but it will strictly enjoin and eagerly participate in the bitterest persecution of the other. It may shake its head in a half playful disapproval of the man, but it will nevertheless receive him at its house, and even marry him to its daughters. For the woman, however, it reserves the name of sinner, and her it religiously outcasts.

Society is well represented in the select company

of Scribes and Pharisees, who in resentment at a flagrant breach of the moral code, invaded the sacred precincts of the Temple, and interrupted Christ in His discourse. The manifestation of their own righteous indignation at this breach of the Law, overrides all considerations against the publication of the woman's shame, and the interruption of the Teacher's discourse. The vindication of the law must take precedence over the preaching of the Gospel. They have such a keen sense of decorum, that they have none left for delicacy. They are so conscious of their own correctness of behaviour, that they are oblivious of the outrage they are committing against decency.

While this is their attitude with regard to the woman and her sin, they are inspired with a very different motive in bringing her into the presence of Christ. Like Society they have often been stung by the preacher's denunciation of their hypocrisy, and now they rejoice in the opportunity of paying off old scores. Here is a lost sheep who has strayed into their fold, and whom after it has suffered the penalty of over-confidence, they are able to drag back with torn and bemired fleece to Him who calls Himself the Good Shepherd. How will the popular preacher, who deals in anecdotes and delights in allegory, treat a concrete case of flagrant sin? Parables may be pretty stories, but adultery is an ugly fact. It is all very well to pose as the friend of publicans and sinners,

but what becomes of the follower of Moses? They have caught one of His congregation red-handed, and they mean to make the most of it.

With an utter disregard for the women's feelings they force her into the centre of the Temple court, and with brutal coarseness they state the case. "Rabbi, this woman has committed adultery and been caught in the very act. Now in the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such to death. But what do you say?" The form of the question has been well thought out, the best mode of putting it has been well considered. They address Him by the title of Rabbi, because they wish to compel Him to expound the Law, not to speak in parables. They represent themselves as in a difficulty. They suggest an antithesis between His teaching and that of the Law. They even pose as Counsel for the defence, making an appeal to a higher tribunal. With that cunning which so often overreaches itself, they fail to see that in exposing the woman's shame, they have exposed their own shamelessness. If the woman was caught red-handed, where is the partner of her guilt? If they have such reverence for the Law, why do they omit its equal condemnation of the man? If they feel compelled to carry out the Law to the letter, why are they screening the principal offender? If they hesitate to expose the woman to the shower of stones, why do they expose her to the gaze of a heartless crowd? If

they feel that the execution of the sentence is committed into their hands, why do they seek to throw the responsibility on to another's shoulders?

“Jesus stooped down and began to write with His finger on the ground.” There are some faces from which one instinctively turns away. The smirk of self-complacency, the stony stare of empty pride, the cruel smile of exultation which the vindictive nature so readily assumes, are sights at which a glance is more than sufficient. Similarly there are faces so overwhelmed with shame, and eyes that are so piteous in their entreaty not to be looked into, that instinctively we drop our head as in the presence of something so sacred, that the ordinary look secularises, while the common gaze profanes. From the faces of the Scribes and Pharisees Christ turned with loathing; before the agonised appeal in the woman's eyes, His own dropped with the sympathy of a great compassion. “He began to write with His finger on the ground.” There are some subjects upon which comment is an indecency, and discussion an outrage on good taste. There are some sins, the record of which should be written in the sand, that the incoming tide of repentance may obliterate the memory. The case, if it be heard at all, must be heard *in camera*. The records, if they are made at all, should be written in the sand. These Scribes and Pharisees have already turned the Temple into a market, He will have nothing to

do with converting it into a Divorce Court. It is a house of prayer where the penitent may appeal for mercy and forgiveness, not a Court of Justice where the criminal receives judgment.

The Scribes and Pharisees are too confident of victory to take advantage of the safe retreat from an untenable position which Christ thus generously offers them. They are too elated at what they consider His confusion to consider their own possible discomfiture. From His reticence they conclude He is silenced; from His bowed head they infer an attempt to conceal His nervousness. Impatient cries of "Answer, answer," resound through the court. Christ rises, and with calm dignity confronts the accusers of the woman. In place of the confusion they expected to see on His face, there is a look before which their own eyes fall, and the awe of a great silence reigns throughout the Temple. "Let the man who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her," Christ replies, and again stooping down He writes upon the ground.

The anticipation had silenced them, His reply strikes them dumb. They had demanded sentence upon the woman, they listen to their own condemnation. They had quoted the words of Moses, they hear the voice of God. This is no opinion of a Rabbi, which can be questioned and discussed; it is the judgment of their own conscience, from which there is no appeal. The

Temple is all at once full of ghosts, in the awful shapes which memory suddenly summons from the dead past. They recognise long-forgotten sins, the companions of earlier days, which they thought were dead and buried in oblivion. As their past rises before them with a vividness which terrifies them, the present scene, with the woman, and Rabbi, and waiting crowd, disappear as with the wave of a magician's rod. Each is so self-conscious that he forgets the others, and one by one they retreat in awe before the day of judgment which they have evoked.

Christ's answer is as remarkable for what it omits as for what it contains, for the feeling He suppresses as for the sentiment He expresses. There is no sarcasm, there is no stern denunciation of their hypocrisy, there is no stinging reproach for their cowardice. He omits all reference to their treatment of the woman, and their attitude to Himself. He contents Himself with making their own conscience articulate, with confronting them with their own judgment on themselves. Having uttered a sentence He does not spoil it with a look. He stoops down and with His finger marks time on the ground. From the grave He had summoned faces which conveyed a deeper reproach than even He could express. He had caused them to hear voices of a long-forgotten past, which uttered a more awful denunciation than even He could give voice to.

He knew when to speak, but He also knew when to keep silence. He knew when to look, but He knew also when not to look.

The echo of the last footstep of the accuser has died away, and a quiet stillness reigns throughout the Temple. Jesus was left alone, and the woman stands where she has been placed, in the centre of the court. What feelings are passing through her breast it is impossible to know. Her accusers have all gone, but the accusation remains. Her guards have all disappeared, but her conscience keeps her a close prisoner. The jury has been dismissed as disqualified, but the Judge still retains His seat. His jurisdiction, which others might dispute, is with her unquestioned. If she could but see His face, she might perhaps anticipate her fate, but it is still bent upon the ground. If He would but speak, the tones of His voice might enable her to guess at the thoughts of His mind, but He is still writing on the ground.

At length the head is raised, the writing ceases, and as Christ rises, the woman's eyes drop in confusion and shame. There is no contempt in the voice nor harshness in the tones which greet her expectant ear. It is not the sentence of the judge, but the question of a friend which is addressed to her. "Woman, where are they? Has no one passed sentence upon you?" The title by which He addresses her is one of respect,

not of contempt. It is the same by which He speaks to His own mother, and would perhaps be better rendered as Lady or Madam. He is anxious to evoke her own self-respect, to appeal to her true womanhood, to remind her that she is the mistress of a home, and bears the honoured name of wife. The question is asked not for His own information, but that she may realise the deliverance she has experienced. The surprise in the question is not meant to condone her offence, but is intended to arouse wonder and gratitude at her escape. Standing as she does self-condemned at the bar of her own conscience, she has yet escaped the hand of the executioner. Was there no hand clean enough to cast the first stone? Was her escape due to the guilt of others instead of to her own innocence?

A host of conflicting passions must have swept across her breast since she first entered the precincts of the Temple courts. Fierce indignation at her public disgrace, unutterable self-loathing at the consciousness of her sin, and an agony of shame at the position she occupied, must all have alternated during the time she stood the cynosure of all eyes. The accusation of the Scribes and Pharisees has called forth no protestation of innocence, nor confession of guilt. She has neither denounced her betrayer and forsaker, nor pleaded anything in extenuation of her guilt. She has maintained an absolute silence. The

gentle tones, however, and the kindly voice unseal her lips, and she answers, "No one, Lord." She has heard Him called Rabbi by her accusers, but to her He is Lord. She waits to hear, not what sentence He will pronounce, for the tones are not those of a judge, but what command He will lay upon her. Henceforth He is her Lord and Master, and she is His slave. She is the captive of a great compassion, the bonds slave of a Divine mercy.

Christ is quick to catch her meaning and respond to her request. The seed of loyalty has already taken root, she has already bowed to the sentence which her own conscience has pronounced upon her; the stones of self-reproach are falling thick and fast upon the false self which has hitherto directed her life. "Neither do I pass sentence," He answers; "Go and sin no more."

The authority for this incident is not to be found by consulting ancient manuscripts, it bears its own mark of genuineness. From whatever source it was derived, however it came into its present position in the Gospel of John, it is too lifelike to be fictitious. One and One only could have been the author of the fact, whoever may be the author of the record. It has established a place for itself in the Church's conception of Christ which nothing can affect. The Church could never have invented it, but having once heard it, it could never forget it.

XI

A DEGENERATE ARISTOCRACY

John viii. 31-59.

OF all the possessions which great men leave to their descendants, their name is the most doubtful legacy. Their estate can be enjoyed and possessed, but their title can only be assumed, and the assumption is rarely justified. Great names are always made, they can never be really inherited. They are priceless to the real owner, but worthless to the mere bearer. They are promissory notes given for value received, and are not transferable. They are payable to order and not to bearer on demand, but are not negotiable. Their possession calls forth self-respect on the part of the owner, their assumption more often begets mere empty pride on the part of the descendants. It is not mere breeding or mere manners which mark the gentleman, but good breeding and good manners. It is not the possession of a great name, but the possession of a great nature which marks the true aristocracy. Pride of birth is pitiful to see, when

it is the birth alone, and not the character, of which a man has cause to be proud. If the man fails to win our reverence, his pedigree fails to command our respect. If the line has been a descent, the lineage betokens a fall.

While high birth in itself secures no privileges in the republic of Nature, it confers advantages and imposes obligations. Men are born to the positions they really occupy, and the estate to which they actually succeed is heavily mortgaged with duties. Rank has its advantages, but it has also its very definite obligations. The advantages which birth secures are never mere arbitrary gifts, they are in strict proportion to the endowments conferred. The accident of birth is an expression which reveals a very superficial observation and a very shallow thought. There may be something accidental in a man's occupation of a position, but there is none in his birth. His social position may be arbitrarily fixed by custom, but his real position is definitely fixed by Nature. Society may attach privileges to his connection with the past, Nature demands the discharge of duties. She pays her tribute by conferring advantages, but she demands a just equivalent. She takes no notice of name and title, but much of character and endowment. From him to whom she has given little she demands little, but from him to whom she has given much she demands much. The title-deeds which she will alone recognise are the

attainments she has herself transmitted. She regards all claims to position unsupported by these as pretensions which expose the claimant to contempt and ridicule. At the same time she is strict to demand the just payment of her dues from those upon whom she has conferred her advantages, and she will denounce as a defaulter the man who takes her gifts but holds back her tribute.

The difference between a true nobility and a mere titled aristocracy is well illustrated in the remarkable interview between Jesus and the descendants of Abraham recorded in the Gospel of John. A little of the blue blood upon which they prided themselves was apparently flowing in the veins of this remnant, who are described as the believing Jews who had been impressed by the teaching and attracted by the personality of Jesus of Nazareth. There was perhaps a slight trace of that dissatisfaction with the actual, and desire for the ideal, which distinguishes Abraham while he still resided with Terah his father, in Ur of the Chaldees, and which later ripened into that faith in the Unknown which sent him forth on his quest of the ideal. These men were impressed but not convinced, interested but not attached. The teaching of this new Prophet of Galilee was something they liked to listen to, but they had no thoughts of accepting it. The truth had aroused them from sleep, it had not yet delivered them

from the prison-house. Their eyes were open, but they had not as yet perceived their chains. Dissatisfaction must deepen into a loathing of the actual, their desire must ripen into a passion for the ideal if they were to obtain the promised inheritance. They must do more than merely see the ideal, they must seize it; they must do more than merely admire the truth, they must submit to it, or the promised land of freedom and peace would never be theirs. Like Abraham they must no longer abide in Chaldea, they must settle in Canaan. Looking upon these descendants of a noble house Christ calls for that whole-hearted devotion of which their forefather had given them so perfect an illustration. "If you abide in My teaching," He says, "then are you My disciples indeed; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you freemen."

The call to a nobler life, however, finds no response within their breasts. Their descent has been a degeneration, their lineage has been a decline. They are too proud of their pedigree to seek to earn a patent of nobility. They are too unconscious of their slavery to be stirred by the call to freedom. "Disciples! Freemen!" they exclaim in contempt; "we are descendants of Abraham, and the yoke of bondage has never been on our necks. What do you mean by saying we shall be freemen?" They have the empty pride of the aristocrat, not the self-respect of the true noble-

man. They are extremely sensitive as to the name they bear, they are indifferent as to the rags they wear. They are so mindful of their descent from Abraham, that they forget their bondage to Rome; so conversant with their genealogy that they are ignorant of their history. The position to which they feel themselves entitled makes them oblivious of the position they occupy. Pride in the fact of their long descent leads them unblushingly to declare that they have never been in bondage to any one.

There is a sensitiveness which is the stamp of true nobility, and there is a touchiness which is the mark of a vulgar mind. The hint which the one will respect, the other will resent. The suggested help which the one will gratefully accept, the other will reject with scorn. Christ had hinted at discipleship and suggested freedom. Instead of nobility He had encountered vulgarity. His suggestion had been received with the stony stare of astonishment, His hint had been received with the contempt of an empty pride. There is accordingly an alteration in His manner, and a different tone in His voice as He replies to them. The gentle hint and the kindly suggestion are lost upon these degraded scions of a noble house. They need the plain statement of actual fact, the solemn warning as to their real condition. He must point to the rags in which they are clothed, He must call their attention to the chains they

wear. "I most solemnly assure you," He replies, "that every one who commits sin is the bondsman of sin. Ishmael was a son of Abraham as much as Isaac, but he did not remain in his father's house. Your pedigree may show that you are children of Abraham, but your position shows that you are no longer in your father's house. You have sold yourselves into captivity, and if you are to be freed you must be redeemed. It is for that purpose that the Son has come, and if He sets you free, then are you free indeed. It may be true that you are children of Abraham, but there is the hate of Ishmael in your hearts. Murder even now looks out of your eyes, because you resent what I am saying, though you know it is true. Yet I say nothing more than what I have learned from my Father, and if you were worthy of the name you bear, you would believe even as Abraham believed."

Their hot resentment has died down, but sullen anger remains. The reference to their poverty has told, but their pride is untouched. The mention of their forefather they take notice of, the reference to his character they ignore. They cannot deny their condition, but they reassert their title. "Our father is Abraham."

Christ does not question their right to the name, He disputes their possession of the nature of Abraham. "If you were children of Abraham, you would do what Abraham did. But as a

matter of fact you are seeking for an opportunity to kill me, whose only offence is that I have told you the truth. That is not what Abraham did. The deeds which you do are those of your real father, whose nature you have inherited." The character we possess and not the name we bear, the kind of actions we perform and not the airs we assume, are the true mark of our descent. The likeness that is stamped upon our face and not the name that is engraved upon our card, is the true witness to our parentage. The look in the eye is a truer indication of the nature of the man than the smile upon his face. The expression which escapes the lips under the excitement of passion is a surer guide by which to judge a man's breeding than the artificial phrases he uses in society. There was murder in the hearts of these men, and it manifested itself in the looks of hate which they cast upon Him.

The flame of resentment burst up in their hearts, and they retorted with fiercest indignation. "We are not bastards. We have one Father, God." True children indeed! Did He think they were illegitimate? If it was religious belief He referred to, did they not believe in the One God of their forefather Abraham? Works of Abraham forsooth! What was his distinguishing act but that of faith in God? They too believed that God was their Father, and could claim a spiritual descent from God, as well as a natural descent from Abraham.

The spiritual claim had less to sustain it than the natural. If they were deficient in the faith which distinguished Abraham, they were destitute of the love which was characteristic of God. "If God were indeed your Father," Christ replies, "you would give evidence of it in the love you show to His Son, for I came from Him and have come to you. I have not come on My own initiative, but it was He who sent Me. How is it that you will not understand what I say? It is because you will not accept what I tell you." The spiritual claim put forth by men with murder in their hearts was blasphemy. Their attitude to the Son showed the relation in which they stood to the Father. The black hate in their hearts betrayed their origin. "The father whose sons you are," He continues, "is not God but the Devil, and you desire to do what will please him. He was a murderer from the beginning, and could not stand erect in the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he utters a lie he speaks naturally, for he is a liar and the propagator of lies." The hate in their heart and the lie on their lips were unmistakable evidence of their true parentage. Sons of God in a sense they might be, even as Cain was a son of Adam, but their hate for the true Son, like that of Cain for Abel, denied their right to the title. In their hearts was the same malice which he bore to his brother, and for the same reason—the bitter envy of a jealous mind.

“Because I speak the truth,” Christ continues, “you will not believe Me. Yet which of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak the truth, why as children of Abraham do you not believe Me? You claim God as your Father; but the child of God listens to the Father’s words. You, however, will not listen, and the reason is plain; it is because you are not what you claim to be, true children of God.”

They are too angry and exasperated to continue to defend their claim to superiority of birth, and betake themselves to the taunts of religious prejudice, and the abuse of petty jealousy. “Are we not right in saying that you are a heretic and a madman?” Surely no one but an heretical Samaritan would deny their descent from Abraham, and no one but a madman would talk such utter nonsense. Wrapping around them the tattered garment of their pride of birth, they endeavour to conceal their mortification under the guise of a contemptuous pity. The man must be one of the outcast Samaritans, whose ignorance must be excused on the score that he is possessed with a devil.

Christ is unruffled by either the contempt or the abuse. There is the consciousness of an inner approval which no outer condemnation can touch, the sense of a Divine commendation which no abuse can alter. “I am not mad,” He answers, “but on the contrary I am honouring My Father by

vindicating His character, while you are revealing your true descent by abusing Me. It is not I, however, who am seeking any glory for Myself; there is One who is seeking it for Me, and He will judge both of your relationship to Himself and of your attitude to Me." It is not pride of birth or glory in a long descent which distinguishes true nobility. It is in actions worthy of a noble ancestry that the honour of a great name is preserved. It is not the glory which a man seeks for himself on the strength of high birth, but the glory which comes to him through conduct worthy of his noble lineage, which stamps him as a true descendant of a great ancestor. "I most solemnly assure you," He continues, "that if any man gives due attention to My instruction he shall never die."

Ignoring His reference to a higher kind of life, they eagerly lay hold of the reference to never dying, as a confirmation of their opinion that He is mad. "Now," they cry out, "we are convinced that you are mad. Abraham died, and so did the prophets, and yet *you* say that if any man gives due attention to *your* teaching he shall never die. Are you greater than our forefather Abraham? He is dead, and the prophets are dead. Who do you make yourself out to be?" Their hatred of the man excludes all consideration of His message. They are so eaten up with pride themselves, that they think He is boasting. They are so conscious

of their own importance, that they conclude He is equally so.

Christ denies the petty self-consciousness attributed to Him, but He cannot deny true knowledge of Himself. He disclaims any self-glorification, but He cannot repudiate the glory which the Father has given Him. The glory with which a man seeks to cover himself is tinsel, but the glory which comes from the Divine approval is pure gold, which nothing but a false humility will endeavour to hide. "Were I to glorify Myself," He replies, "I should have no real glory. One there is who glorifies Me—My Father, the very One whom you claim to be your God. You, however, do not even know Him, but I know Him perfectly. Were I, in fact, to deny My knowledge of Him, I should be a liar even like yourselves, for my professed ignorance, like your professed knowledge, would be untrue. On the contrary I know Him, and I obey His commands in making Him known. As for your forefather Abraham, for whom you profess so much reverence, he exulted in looking forward to My day. Moreover, far from being dead, he has seen it and rejoiced at the sight."

The sublimity of the thought they are quite unable to perceive. To them the sublime is the ridiculous, and the ridiculous the sublime. The relationship between Christ and His Father, of which He is conscious, is to them the absurd

assertion of a madman, and excites their amusement. The ridiculous claim to greatness which they put forth as their right through long descent, is to them the dignified assertion of their nobility. "You are not yet fifty," they exclaim in amusement, "and have you seen Abraham?" They have such little insight, that the idea of Abraham's foresight never occurs to them.

Christ realises that the plane of thought in their minds is entirely different from His own. They are concerned with the material, while He is speaking of the spiritual ; they are immersed in the temporal, while He moves in the eternities. They need to be startled into seriousness, their levity needs to be replaced by solemnity. They will doubtless not believe, but at least they must be told that His consciousness extends over a longer period than their lineage, that His life is not bounded by time, but is an ever-present now. "Before Abraham was even born, I am."

There is a seriousness in the tone which forbids ridicule ; there is a meaning in the words which, though too deep for them to grasp, is too clear to be mistaken. This is not madness, it is blasphemy ; it is not heresy, it is treason. The smouldering anger which His denial of their claim to true nobility had at first aroused, bursts forth again in fierce resentment at the audacity of this claim on

His part, and the self-styled aristocrats betake themselves to the weapons of the vulgar mob. The exposure is complete as the descendants of Abraham pick up stones to hurl at the Messiah of promise.

XII

THE MAN WHOSE SUFFERING ENNOBLED HIM

John ix. 1-41.

THE problem of suffering ever has been, and as far as we can see is likely to remain, the great enigma, whose solution is for ever attempted and for ever baffles the human mind. Sooner or later the cry, Check, meets us as we try to move our king into one or other of the many positions which seem open to us. Each move of the king only seems to reveal some opposition piece lying in wait, until we give up in despair and confess that the problem which has been set us is insoluble. This is doubtless true of one aspect of the problem, and is largely, if not entirely, due to the position of the pieces on the board when we attempt the solution. We have fixed our conception of the character of God on the one hand, and our perception of the nature of suffering on the other, and have set ourselves the impossible task of reconciling opposites. God is essentially beneficent, suffering is essentially maleficent, and the one is the negative of the other.

The problem in the majority of cases is not to reconcile the presence of suffering with the existence of God, but to reconcile our conception of that aspect of God's character which we call beneficent, with our perception of that aspect of suffering which we characterise as maleficent. We have surrounded the king with knight and bishop and pawn, so that for every possible move a check is waiting. Our various attempts at a solution consist in the exchange of a pawn for some other piece, but the inevitable checkmate is merely postponed thereby. As long as suffering is looked at as an effect whose cause is to be found in God's activity, the problem set us is more or less insoluble. This aspect of the question is more or less forced upon us by the constitution of our minds, which demands a cause for every effect, and seeks to replace the many causes by one sole cause. If any light is to come to us from this aspect of the question, it can only come by regarding suffering, not as the effect of God's activity, but as an effect of His existence ; not, that is, from what He does and permits, but from what He Himself is and feels. As long as we regard Him solely as the active or passive producer of suffering, the problem is an enigma leading to despair. If we conceive of Him as Himself a partaker, a voluntary sharer, the problem may not be solved, but it is no longer an enigma. Beneficence and the infliction of suffering in God present a problem which to many minds is

inexplicable. Beneficence and voluntary participation in suffering on the part of God, is an entirely different problem. It may present difficulties in another direction, but the moral difficulty has to a large extent disappeared. We may ask why God should suffer, and find the solution just as difficult, but while our failure may convince us of our insufficiency for the task we have attempted, it will not land us in despair.

There is, however, another aspect of the problem of suffering which we are in danger of forgetting. Suffering may be regarded as an effect whose cause must in the last resort be sought in God, but it may also be looked at as a cause whose effect, as discovered in human life and conduct, justifies its presence as one of the working forces of the world. The two problems are not the same, but they are two aspects of one subject. The solution of the one does not help us much in the solution of the other, but both are equally important. The consideration of suffering as a cause is productive of much richer results than the consideration of suffering as an effect. In the latter case we are questioning the reason for its presence, in the former we have accepted it as an ultimate, a force in the moral, like gravity in the physical, realm, and we are seeking its reasonableness in the effects it is able to produce. We have ceased to ask the why, we have replaced it with the what, and the results are proportionately greater. Even here there are

elements of discord and contrariety, but the unknown is not a paralysing influence, while the known is invigorating and inspiring.

The relation of Christ to the problem of suffering has not received the attention it deserves, largely perhaps because we have been struck with the fact, though we have hardly appreciated its significance, that to Christ apparently the problem did not exist. Though He was pre-eminently the Man of Sorrows, though His life was from beginning to end clouded with suffering, yet, as far as we can see, the problem, as far as we are accustomed to formulate it, never presented itself to His thought, nor entered into His teaching. No one has ever entered into such loving and trustful relation with the Father as did Jesus Christ, no one has ever conceived of God in such deep ethical terms, and yet, as far as we can understand from the records of His life which have come down to us, the problem of His own suffering or the suffering with which He was confronted every day never in the slightest degree interfered with that perfectly trustful communion between His spirit and God which is the distinguishing feature of His unique life. He found no difficulty such as other minds have found in reconciling the presence of suffering with His distinctive conception of God as the Father. From the entire absence of any special reference to the question on the part of Christ, it seems reasonable to conclude that for Christ

at least the problem, is as though it were not. This cannot be explained by any reference to national life or creed. The Jew felt the problem as keenly as, if not more keenly than the Gentile. The book of Job is a sufficient evidence of that. The explanation must be sought in the direction previously indicated, namely, in the conception of suffering, not as an effect of God's activity merely, but as a constituent element in, a *sine qua non* of the Divine nature. If one were to interpret what apparently was Christ's conception of suffering, we should have to express it in similar terms to those which He applied to His own work. Of that work He said, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I also work." Of His suffering He would have said, "My Father suffereth hitherto, and I also suffer." The cup which He had to drink was one from which His physical nature shrank, but it was one which offered no difficulty to His moral and spiritual nature. He speaks of it as "The cup which My Father giveth Me." If it be possible, He desires that it shall pass from Him untasted, but so convinced is He of its harmony with the conception of God as Father, that He adds, "Nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt." Whatever conception we may form as to the real nature of Jesus Christ, whether we regard Him as human or Divine, there can be no doubt that He attained to a sane and healthy conception of the moral character of God which is unique in the

history of religious thought. It is in the highest degree significant, therefore, that in those serene heights of religious thought and feeling in which Christ moved we find not a trace of that perplexed thought due to a realisation of what we call the problem of suffering. It is difficult to see what other explanation there can be of this significant fact, besides that which connects suffering, not with the actions, but with the very nature of God. He who was at one with the Father, found no "problem" either in His own personal suffering or in the suffering of others.

On the question, as distinct from the problem, of suffering, the attitude of Christ is definite and clear. Suffering was constantly before Him, it shaped His ministry and coloured all His teaching. To Christ, however, it was an ultimate beyond which He did not travel. He discussed its justification as little as He did the sequence of the seasons, or any other manifestation of God's natural order. It was something which appealed to His compassion and called forth His help, but as a problem it never presented itself to His mind. This is well seen in the remarkable interview with the man who was born blind, which is recorded in the Gospel of John. As He and His disciples passed along the streets of Jerusalem, they met a blind beggar sitting by the wayside and asking alms. He was evidently a well-known figure, and the disciples appear to have been acquainted with

something of his history. Their minds had been quickened by their intercourse with their Master, and the problem of suffering, about which they had probably thought and discussed amongst themselves, was suddenly brought to their minds by the sight of the blind man. "Master," they ask, "who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" They are familiar with the common conception of their day, that sin and suffering are invariably associated as cause and effect. They are curious to know whose sin the present suffering represents, the man's own or his parents'. The Jewish pedants had carried their fanciful interpretation even beyond a man's actual birth, and dealt with prenatal sins, so that the disciples are merely expressing ideas which they had gathered, rather than ideas which they originated.

Christ's answer is remarkable, not merely for the emphatic negative which it contains, but for its positive assertion. "Neither he nor his parents sinned; but he was born blind in order that the works of God might be manifested in him." He negatives the idea that suffering must be regarded as invariably connected with sin. Such a conception is unjust as well as untrue, leads to misjudgment as well as to incorrect conclusions. It is due to looking at suffering as an effect. Suffering may be a cause, and the difference of the standpoint at once alters the whole aspect of the case. The man's suffering must not be

regarded as an effect of sin or of anything else ; it is to be looked at as a cause intended to evoke compassion and help in others, and capable of producing moral effects in the man himself. The answer is remarkable, especially as coming from One who was essentially an Idealist. Christ ignores the "why" of the modern problem, and confines His attention to the "what" of practical conduct. In the case of the man who raised the social problem, He goes to the root of the evil, and turns away from the practical redress. In the case of the question of divorce, He replies as the Idealist, ignoring the actual and going back to the origin of the marriage institution. Here on the other hand, when the problem of suffering is raised, He ignores the theory and gives the answer of the practical. There is no inconsistency here, it is due to an essential distinction between the different problems. The social problem and the divorce question have their origin in the human sphere of conduct, and it is the ideal alone which can explain and settle them. The question of suffering is in Christ's mind connected with the Divine nature, its mystery is the mystery that of necessity belongs to the nature of God. It is an ultimate with which we have to deal, to which we have to accommodate ourselves, not something which we can discuss and explain. It has a purpose which it behoves us to find out, it presents us with an opportunity which we do

well to seize ere it passes from our grasp. We must do the works of God while the daylight lasts, for the night is coming in which work is impossible. The suffering which paralyzes us as a problem, inspires us as an opportunity for a manifestation of that compassion and help which make us akin to God. In the depths of the Divine nature there may be a reconciliation between the thought which institutes, and the feeling which relieves, suffering ; between the pain which feels, and the joy which results from suffering ; but the depths of the Divine nature we cannot fathom. The response of the heart, however, is of more consequence than the answer of the head.

Having replied to the disciples' question, Christ turns to the blind man, and anointing his eyes with clay, tells him to go to the Pool of Siloam and wash. The man has doubtless listened to the discussion with interest. He has probably raised the same question many a time in his own mind, but has been unable to answer it. Christ's answer impresses him with its justice, and the reference to doing the works of God fills him with a new hope. The command therefore of Christ he receives in silence, but obeys without question. There is something in the tones of the voice which inspires confidence. He cannot read faces, but he is a good judge of people's voices. His faith is rewarded, and he returns in full possession of the sight which from his birth had been denied him.

His interview with the Pharisees is full of interest, as showing the character of the man, and the influence his infirmity had had upon him. There is an honesty and straightforwardness about him which betoken a character quite the reverse of that which we should expect from one who had been so grievously handicapped. He had been blind from his birth, but the deprivation of one faculty had increased the power of the others, and he reveals a quick and ready mind which no amount of brow-beating can affect. He has been a beggar all his life, but he has not been ungrateful or complaining. He remembers with affection those who have helped him, and his gratitude finds expression in a sturdy defence of his benefactor. He has not been able to work, but he has been accustomed to think and form his own opinions, and his reasoning faculty is more than equal to the demand which his interview with the rulers of the synagogue makes upon it. He has never had a chance of judging men by their countenances, but he has been a keen reader of character, and knows a good man when brought into contact with him. He has his own conceptions of religion, though he has probably received little instruction from the religious teachers of his people, and one of his convictions is that, whatever people may think and say about a man, God takes notice of character, and answers the prayer of a righteous man. He has too

much honesty to fall in with the suggestion that he should give glory to God when that involves passing condemnation upon the man who has cured him. The rulers may profess to know that his healer is a sinner if they like, but he knows the gracious work He has performed, and there is the echo of those words of Christ still ringing in his ears—"Neither has this man sinned nor his parents"—and he is not going to repay his benefactor with slander. They may have their own opinion of the nature of the miracle, and refer it to Beelzebub if they will, but he recalls the words, "I must work the works of Him that sent Me," and he stoutly maintains that God does not hear sinners. They may impugn his loyalty to Moses, and cast him out of the synagogue, but they cannot make him disloyal to the One who has given him sight. As the result of his suffering the man is outwardly a beggar, but inwardly he is a royal prince. His infirmity has not soured him, he is ever cheerful. Instead of debasing him, it has ennobled him. Sight has been withheld, but insight has been gained. He may be forsaken even by his parents, but he will not forsake his friend. The ban of excommunication which the Pharisees pass upon him is a patent of nobility. Handicapped though he has been, in character he stands head and shoulders above his persecutors. .

Christ hears that they have excommunicated

him, and finds him out. Deserted by his own parents for fear of the Jews, the man is alone and friendless. The One Friend, however, for whom he had suffered does not forsake him, but seeking him out asks, "Do you believe in the Son of God?" The title is that of the Messiah, and as such the man understands it, but though he believes his Healer to be a prophet, he does not yet know that He is the Messiah. He has, however, enough confidence to believe whatever Christ tells him, for he has already realised that He is one who has come from God, and his past confidence was justified by results. "Who is he, Sir," he answers; "tell me, that I may believe in Him?"

This was another case, like that of the Samaritan woman, where Christ felt that He could speak plainly. The man had already proved his loyalty, and had suffered in consequence of it. Cut off from his old life, and excommunicated by the religious authorities, the man needed a new interest in life, a new centre around which his religious thought and feeling could gather. His eyes had been opened by the Messiah, his gaze needed to be directed to the Messiah. Vision had been given, but it needed adjustment. He had recognised the Divine voice when he had heard it, he needed to connect it with the fulfilment of his nation's hopes and aspirations in the actual coming of its Messiah. "You have seen Him," answers

Christ ; “ and more than that, the One who is now talking to you is He.” The new faculty of sight is a confirmation of the old faculty of insight. The man though deprived of sight had recognised the Divine by the exercise of his ear. The tones of the voice had been his guide, and they had not deceived him. He had felt that this Man must be sent of God, and he now learns that He is the Messiah of promise. He had walked by faith hitherto and not by sight, henceforth he would be able to walk by sight as well as by faith. He had heard the voice but had not been able to see the face, yet he had believed that the Healer was a prophet. Now he sees as well as hears, and the recognition is instantaneous. “ I believe, Lord,” he cries out, and bends the knee in loving reverence to the Saviour who is also the King.

Christ recognises in the whole incident the working out of a law of just compensation, which His own presence and ministry have emphasised. He has not come to explain the mystery of suffering, or to clear up the darker mystery of sin. The effect of His coming, however, is the manifestation of the just law of compensation. Suffering means deprivation, it involves a life of dependence upon others, but it brings its own compensations. In place of sight there is insight ; in place of material, there is spiritual prosperity ; instead of the exercise of power there is a development of character. The man who is

blind may see what the man who sees is blind to. Those who have sight are not always possessed of insight. Religion is a great revealer, and life looked at from the spiritual standpoint appears very different from the aspect which the contemplation of it from the non-religious standpoint presents. There are lives which are rich though they seem to be poor, others which are full of joy though they seem to be filled with sorrow, and others again which are blessed with an inner light though the windows seem to be darkened. A just discrimination is what Christ came to accomplish, and indeed has accomplished. He has not solved the problems of life which we have constructed, but He has given us His judgment upon life, and in the light of that judgment things are not what they seem. Suffering stands revealed as beneficent rather than maleficent, sorrow is transfigured with a divine glory, and even around the black cloud with which the problem of evil darkens human life there is a golden glory which points to the final goal of good. "I have come for judgment," He says, as His comment on what has taken place, "so that those who are blind may see, and those who see may become blind." The Pharisees catch the words but not the meaning, and with a supercilious and sarcastic air ask, "We also are blind ; is that what you mean?" Their words are truer than their thought. What they think is biting

sarcasm is bitter and literal truth. There is a double meaning in the word which Christ takes up. There is a blindness which, like that of the man who has been healed, is a misfortune, but there is another which is a sin. The one is blameless, the other is criminal. If they *could* not see, they would be guiltless. That they *would* not see left them without excuse. "If you *were* blind you would be guiltless; but as a matter of fact you pose as seers, and as a consequence the sin of wilfully shutting your eyes remains."

XIII

AN UNCONVENTIONAL LAWYER

Luke x. 25-37.

THE law of motion, that action and reaction are equal and opposite, applies to the mental as well as to the physical spheres. In estimating the effect of mental training, we must always take into account the character of the mind that is trained, as well as the nature of the training to which it is subjected. Some minds have an elasticity which causes them to rebound in the opposite direction from that to which their system of training has forced them. The man who has been trained in the strictest principles of reason will suddenly develop an extraordinary capacity for faith. The materialistic philosopher will suddenly be transformed into the spiritualist or theosophist. The mind which has been brought up in unquestioning obedience to authority, will as suddenly assert its own innate right to command and think for itself. A man's training is a force which tends in a given direction, and its effect can be calculated

with exactness. The man himself, however, is also a force, and his strength or weakness has to be taken into account in determining the final result. Some minds are essentially passive, with a great capacity for receptivity, and as the result the man is more or less what his training has made him. Others, however, are essentially active, they not only assimilate and absorb, but they transform. Their training doubtless acts upon them, but its true effect is seen in the reaction which follows, and this carries them in an entirely different direction from that which their training predicted. A man's knowledge may indicate the value of the training he has received, but it is the use he makes of his knowledge which indicates the value of the man.

The lawyer who came to Christ with the same question which the young ruler asked, while probably a recipient of the same training, was a very different type of character. There was none of the enthusiasm which characterised the younger man, nor is there any of the admiration for the Prophet of Nazareth, which is so marked in the case of the ruler, both in his approach and in the style of his address. The lawyer is evidently a much older man. Whatever may have been the distinguishing feature of his younger days, enthusiasm is certainly not that of his later years. If he ever possessed any it has long since died down. A wider experience of life and of the

character of his fellow-men has made him too cautious to commit himself, like the young ruler, to any description of character by merely scanning a countenance. He has heard of the reputation of the Galilean Prophet, and he is anxious to test the value of the report. It is a mental satisfaction which he seeks, not a yearning of the soul which he feels compelled to satisfy. It is the interest a man feels in an intellectual problem, not the intensity of a spiritual craving, which brings him to Jesus of Nazareth. While this is doubtless true, the nature of the question he asks reveals an individuality which distinguishes him from a mere member of a class, one of the many lawyers with whom Jerusalem abounds. Though a lawyer by profession, it is no mere legal question which he asks. However much his training and daily profession may have tended to extinguish any desire for a deeper life which he may once have possessed, there was at least the memory of his earlier aspirations, the recollection of the deeper and more earnest questions of life, which in his youth and early manhood had pressed for answer and had pressed in vain. The reports about the young Prophet of Galilee have stirred old memories; ghosts of the old ideals, which were once so throbbing with life, emerge from forgotten graves within his mind, and recall his early enthusiasm. Has this Jesus of Nazareth solved the problems which proved too much for himself, and discovered

the answer to the question of questions which he long ago gave up as unanswerable? He is indifferent to the quibbles of his professional brethren, the splitting of hairs which they have reduced to a fine art, those fine distinctions which are the delight of the casuistical mind. These are to him no tests by which to discover whether a man has a message for his fellows. Can this prophet answer the problem of the human heart which craves for life, and that in richer abundance? His answer to this question will determine His position as a religious teacher. His ability to speak to the heart of His fellow-men is the best evidence of the claim which is put forth on His behalf, that He is a prophet of God. He comes therefore to Christ, not as a lawyer primed with some intricate question of law or ritual, but as a man with intensely human interests, seeking an answer to the great question of the human heart. Dispensing with all preliminaries, he comes to the heart of the matter with a directness and plainness of speech, which reveal a human heart, and not a legal mind. "Rabbi," he asks, "what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

At first sight it seems as though Christ's answer was ill-adapted to the mental attitude of His questioner. The man had come, not as the lawyer but as the man. He had rid himself of the influence of his training and profession, looked at life with the eyes of a layman, and asked a question,

not of legal significance, but of deep human interest. His mind was emancipated from the slavery of a special training, and the tyranny of an exclusive profession. He had extricated himself from those class prejudices and professional views of religion which so effectually prevented his fellow-lawyers from taking a human view of things. The reaction of a healthy human mind and heart had come, direct thinking had taken the place of the tortuous windings of a casuistical mind, the honest facing of a problem of real interest had taken the place of quibbling evasions of imaginary difficulties. "What is written in the Law, how have you read it?" seems like the tactless answer of a tyro in the art of teaching, rather than the reply of an expert. Instead of leading the man further on in the path of freedom upon which he has entered, it seems like conducting him back to his old captivity. The expert, however, can take risks which are fatal for the tyro to attempt. The skilled physician, with his hand on his patient's pulse, can administer a life-giving stimulant which in the hands of the ordinary practitioner would be attended with fatal results. While in theory the end never justifies the means, in practice the result justifies the act. Reaction is the continuation of the action of the initial force, the rebound of the mind is the result of the action of the same force which originally set it moving. The mind will sometimes respond more readily to the action of

an old impulse than to the attraction of a new motive. A push from behind is sometimes more effective than a pull in front. A man's early training is never altogether in vain, however much he may in later life and with a wider experience deprecate the influences to which he was subjected. In this man's case the Law had been a schoolmaster which had led him to Christ, and Christ rightly interpreted the work which the old master had accomplished. The student is desirous of entering a new school, it is therefore expedient to find out how far he has read in the old. "What is written in the Law, how have you read it?" The old text-book may be obsolete, but it is not worthless. The primer may be inadequate, but it is not untrue. The time may have come to discard it, but the time will never come to despise it. All that we are we owe to the Law which has been taught us, and even our present attitude of antipathy is due to the impulse it originally gave us. How have we read the revelation it contained? What use have we made of the knowledge it imparted? If we have failed in our use of the primer, we are hardly likely to succeed with the advanced reader. *How* we have read is of far more importance than *what* we have read. The influence the training has exerted upon us is of far greater importance than the form the training took.

Christ's method of dealing with His questioner is fully justified by the answer it evoked. The

Law had stimulated the man's religious thinking, its study had succeeded in enabling him to ask a question which it was inadequate to answer. The old schoolmaster, in spite of his antiquated ways and prosy methods, had successfully accomplished his task. In spite of giving his pupil much that was trifling and commonplace, he had shown him the essentials of a sound education, and opened up to his mind unexplored vistas of a deeper knowledge. The pupil, too, had not wasted his time in accumulating a mass of rules and formulas which were useless and obsolete. He had gained an insight into the heart of religion which made him long for a deeper knowledge, and produced a dissatisfaction with his present attainments. While his school-fellows were absorbed in the straight lines and pothooks of the infant class, the jots and tittles of the alphabet, he had grasped the great fact that the outgoing of the heart to God and man constituted the very essence of the religious life. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength; and thy neighbour as thyself."

There is the fullest appreciation of the student's attainments in the answer Christ makes. There is the most generous recognition on the part of the new teacher of the pupil's successful career in the old school. "You have answered correctly, you have grasped the significance of the lessons you

have been taught. The rules have been faithfully committed to memory, the principles have been well understood." With that keen perception of character, however, which marks the perfect teacher, He perceives the defect in the man's character. Intelligence is stamped upon the brow, but indecision is clearly marked in the lines of the mouth. The failure is not due to any lack of intelligence, but to a defect of will, a lack of application. The pupil knows the rules perfectly, he does not apply them correctly. "This do and you shall live." Put into practice the knowledge you have obtained, and the life you desire shall be your own possession. Religion is not knowledge, it is living. Morality is not ethical theory, it is ethical practice. The satisfaction which the heart craves for is different from the satisfaction which the mind discovers. The mind is satisfied with the perception of truth, the heart is only satisfied with its realisation in life.

The shaft went home, and the man recoils from the sting of his own conscience. He knows his own weakness, and the self-evident truth rouses his slumbering conscience. There is nothing new in the remark, he has known it all the time, but the application of it to his own life and conduct stings him with a sense of shame, and his failure fills him with reproach. The pupil is confronted with his old exercise-books, and the blots and mistakes with which they are filled cause him to

hang his head in confusion and shame. While the man within him is silent under the sense of guilt, the lawyer within him takes up the defence of the prisoner at the bar. The Law may be simplicity itself, but the application is by no means as easy as it seems. Principles are easy to grasp, but hard to apply. Terms may be so comprehensive as to be indefinite, duties may be so conflicting as to be confusing. "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" may be a simple rule of life, but life is by no means simple but complex. Who is the neighbour whom I must love as much as I love myself? While the man is dumbfounded with the directness of the charge, the lawyer is busy arranging the line of defence, and here his training and education stand him in good stead. He is ready with his authorities, and fully primed with precedents.

Christ's reply is as characteristic of the Teacher as it is appropriate to the pupil. In place of the definition which has been asked, He gives the illustration that is needed. The man's failure has not been due to any inability to perceive, but to an unwillingness to perform. He has again and again perceived the duty, but evaded it. The opportunity has presented itself, but he has passed it by. He has both recognised his neighbour and perceived his need, but, like the priest and the Levite, he has passed by on the other side. The truth which the mind has recognised, the heart has

not responded to. The knowledge which has been acquired has not been used. Christ takes no notice of the lawyer, He makes His appeal to the man. With the skill of the Master, He depicts in a few bold outlines a well-known landscape with a few familiar figures. With lifelike vividness a simple act of common charity is sketched, and in a few pregnant sentences the natures of priest and Levite and Samaritan are exposed to view. The man is suddenly confronted with the answer to his own question by means of the counter question, "Which of these three was neighbour to the man who fell among thieves?" Now it is the lawyer who is silent and the man who speaks. He takes thought neither of race nor position, he sees neither priest nor Levite nor Samaritan, but a brother responding to a brother's need, a human heart overflowing with pity for another's misfortune, bending in compassion to relieve another's distress. Almost before he knows it, there slips from between his lips, Jew and lawyer though he be, the answer, "The one who had pity on him."

The first lesson in the new school is over, and the teacher's work for the day is done. The new pupil has been admitted, and the first home lesson has been given. "Go," says Christ, "and act in the same way."

XIV

THE TWO SISTERS

Luke x. 38-42.

THERE is a ministry of being as well as of doing, a sanctification of living as well as a consecration of service. There are some natures which are essentially passive, whose power is in their receptivity, and whose chief ministry is in their presence. Their lives pronounce benedictions, just as the activities of others confer benefactions. The bequests with which they enrich the world are not great charities and noble deeds, but sacred memories and gracious influences. They are the flower gardens of humanity, whose value is in their beauty, not the orchards and fields, whose value is in their utility. Their ministry is the ministry of flowers, and their charm is not in what they do, but in what they are. They are no drones in the hive of human industry, nor yet busy bees hurrying here and there in the prosecution of their useful task. They are flowers in the garden, distilling fragrance and supplying sweetness.

They do not toil neijther do they spin, yet the aroma which they exude no toil can produce, and the exquisite beauty in which they are clothed no spinning can equal. They transform the crude materials in their environment into fragrance and sweetness, but the operation is carried on within, the aroma and the nectar are in their own natures. While they thus work for themselves, they live for others. They exude their aroma with generosity, they part with their nectar with liberality.

Religion is not a revolution which destroys the old order, it is an evolution which transforms it. The spiritual is the perfection, not the destruction, of the natural. It is the legitimate successor, not the foreign usurper. "That is not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural ; the spiritual is that which comes afterwards." Conversion does not change the essentially passive nature into the active, nor the essentially active into the passive. It sanctifies the passive and consecrates the active. It gives a more delicate scent and a richer nectar to the wild flower ; it transforms the crab into the luscious apple, the grass into the life-giving wheat. It is not an alchemy for the transmutation of metals, it is the refiner's fire for their purification. It is not the destruction of the man for the purpose of saving his soul, it is the development of the soul for the purpose of saving the man. The true response therefore to the influence of religion must

be natural and not artificial. It is a transfiguration, not a transmutation. The face, though it shines as the sun, is the same face ; the garments, though white and glistening, are the garments with which we are familiar. It is a manifestation of the real but ideal nature into which the actual has been transformed. The natural disposition is spiritualised, the spiritual influence is naturalised. New organs are not created for the spiritual man, the rudimentary organs of the natural man are evolved and perfected. The culture of the soul therefore is not the uprooting of natural graces, but the nurturing and perfecting of them. The wild flowers are not destroyed, they are cultivated. The reception of the Divine Spirit into the heart, which constitutes the essence of the religious life, must not be formal but natural. His presence must deepen feeling and increase activity. The part in the entertainment which we offer must be the one we are naturally fitted to sustain. The guest feels most at home when the host is most natural. The spiritual life is most real when it is least artificial.

The scene in the home of Bethany is one of those unspoken parables of Jesus, which, like His spoken ones, are pregnant with spiritual meaning, because they are instinct with natural feeling. They illustrate the spiritual by demonstrating the natural. He taught in parables, because the parable is the only medium for the teaching He had to

impart. We can only arrive at the unknown by means of the known. We can only understand the mental by means of the material, the spiritual by means of the natural. The eye must see before the mind can perceive, the ear must hear before the heart can understand. If the natural is not seen, the spiritual cannot be perceived. True insight into the one is the perception of the other. It is only as we understand the naturalness of the reception of Jesus by the two sisters that we understand the spiritual significance of the story. It appeals to us as a parable, because it touches us as a story. It is because it is so perfectly natural that it is so intensely spiritual.

One of the most pathetic utterances which Christ ever made about Himself is the single reference to His homelessness. "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has not where to lay His head." Christ never had a home of His own. From the time when He left His father's home in Nazareth where He was brought up, He was a wanderer. To all the comfort which the word suggests, to all the sacred joy associated with the name, He was a complete stranger. That His nature craved for fellowship is evidenced by the references He made to His loneliness, and by His frequent communion with the Father. That He needed the quietness and peace which others find within the privacy of their own homes is proved by His frequent

retirements to the solitude of the desert or of the mountain. The home at Bethany appears to have been to Christ a haven of rest and quiet calm, where He sought refuge from the storms and tumult to which His Judean ministry exposed Him. It was a land-locked harbour protected from the wild gusts of fierce passion and bitter malice which confronted Him as He steered His course amidst the angry billows and sunken rocks of the neighbouring Jerusalem. In Bethany there was always a home which offered a loving welcome, and hearts which responded with a sincere affection.

Of Lazarus little is recorded which reveals the character of the man, but that Jesus called him friend is full of significance, and that He loved him is the highest testimony to his sterling worth. Of the two sisters, however, we have speaking likenesses. Their characters are of that pronounced type which is stamped on every act and manifested in every scene. In joy or in sorrow, at the feast or at the funeral, the individuality of each is clearly marked, the position of each is definitely fixed. Christ knows them perfectly. He has no need to ask Mary where Martha is at the time of feasting, nor to ask Martha where Mary is at the time of mourning. There is the hall-mark of goodness on each of them, but you must look for it in the activity of the one and in the receptivity of the other. The goodness of Martha will be manifested in her many duties, that of Mary in

her deep feeling and serious thinking. They were ideal sisters, and together took the place of the ideal wife, whom Lazarus must have despaired of finding. The one sister was the complement of the other in the home of Bethany. Martha made the home complete with every comfort, Mary filled it with peace and joy. If Martha was absent Lazarus felt uneasy, if Mary was away he was depressed. Neither sister could fill the other's place. Martha would have made a most fidgety Mary, and Mary a most unconcerned Martha. The one was a perfect head of the house, the other was the heart of the home. A division of work could never have been discussed between them, for it divided itself. Each instinctively took the part that naturally fell to her, and their united efforts made the home at Bethany an elysium of comfort and happiness.

It was probably at Martha's suggestion that the special feast was prepared with which to welcome Jesus on one of His periodical halts at their home. It afforded her the right opportunity of showing her affection and esteem for her brother's honoured guest. She was probably celebrated for her perfect entertainments, and took a just pride in the satisfaction they invariably elicited. For such a house-keeper as Martha must have been, the feast is the chief way in which she can express her esteem for her guest, and her anxiety to render him a service. That which probably most appealed to Martha and

aroused her compassion, as she thought of the homelessness of Jesus, was the absence of those creature comforts which she regarded as so essential to her brother's welfare. She doubtless listened with interest to the accounts He gave them of His varied receptions at the different towns and villages He visited in His journeyings, but her mind dwelt longest on the irregularity of His meals, and the absence of those little home comforts which bulked so largely in her housekeeper's mind. With the motherly heart with which every true woman is invariably endowed, she pitied the wanderer, and resolved that as long as He was her guest He should be surrounded with every comfort and receive every attention. The feast was but the earnest of the many good things she had in store for Him.

In the best regulated households, however, things do not always go smoothly. The fire, despite the most careful laying, will smoke, the watched pot will not boil, and the unwatched one will boil over. The best trained servants are servants after all, and the eye is less keen and the hand is less steady than the mistress's own. Martha's eye cannot be in every place, and even Martha has but one pair of hands. She has but time to give the Master a hearty but hasty greeting, when a message calls her back to the kitchen. Her momentary absence, however, has been long enough for something to go wrong. To

Mary naturally falls the part of entertaining the guest until the feast is ready and Martha shall call them to take part in the triumph of her skill. While Mary is performing her part as hostess in the reception room, Martha is fully occupied between the kitchen and the dining-hall, in attending to those multifarious details which demand the mistress's personal attention and supervision. Suddenly the hanging purdah which divides the reception room from the more interior apartments of the house is hastily pulled aside, and the flushed face of the worried Martha arrests the flow of conversation, and her querulous tones disturb the quiet of the little group : " Master, do you not care that my sister has left me to attend to everything ? Tell her to help me."

The picture is a perfect photograph of the scene. We can see in the background both the dining-hall and the kitchen. The hurrying figures of the maids enable us to realise that Martha's anxiety as to the feast being ready in time is fully justified, while we can ourselves see that the tablecloth is, as Martha has just declared, not properly laid, and the couches are certainly not quite in line. Poor Martha ! it is this last source of annoyance which has been too much for her, and made her feel that Mary might at least have attended to these matters, instead of leaving her to do everything alone. The many little details to which her anxiety that everything should go off perfectly has called her

attention have assumed larger proportions than usual. At another time she would have laughed at the idea of needing Mary's help, but to-day her over-anxiety has affected the servants, and their nervous solicitude to please has resulted in the series of mishaps and accidents which have brought that look of worry and helplessness on the face of the usually calm and collected Martha. Mary is more surprised at the look on her sister's face than at the unusual words on her lips. That Martha should be unequal to her task is a greater wonder than that she should complain of being left alone. We are more conscious of kinship through our failures than through our virtues. How perfectly human is Martha's unreasonableness, how natural is her resentment. We are quite ready to admit that Mary's position is nearer to the ideal, but it is Martha's with which we feel the most sympathy. The worry on Martha's face calls forth a deeper note of sympathy than the wonder in Mary's eyes.

There was none of that irritability in Christ which so often characterises great men when they are interrupted in a conversation. The worried look and the anxious face call forth a compassionate sympathy. He knows that it is all for His sake that Martha has taken so much trouble and tired herself beyond her strength. There is a kindly remonstrance at such needless anxiety, a gentle hint that much less would more than suffice.

“Martha, Martha, you are putting yourself to far too much trouble on My account, and worrying about so many things in connection with the feast, forgetting that, agreeable and pleasant though it be, it is only a part of the entertainment which this kindly house provides for Me. The guest’s entertainment is the only thing that the hostess need trouble about, and in that entertainment Mary has chosen the part for which she is best fitted, and which is therefore the best for her, and she shall not be deprived of it.” The delicacy of the remonstrance addressed to Martha is only equalled by the chivalrous defence of Mary. Martha retired to her many duties, and Mary remained at the feet of the Master, but they both learned the great lesson that we serve best when we do that for which we are best fitted, and that we please the Master most when we cheerfully and gladly recognise the good part which others choose for the expression of their love and devotion to our common Lord.

XV

MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

Matt. xix. 3-12 ; Mark x. 2-12.

Is marriage a failure, is not a modern question ; it is the discussion of the question in the public papers which is the only novelty. Adam must have asked the question first, when he found his paradise exchanged for the wilderness, and his sons and daughters have been repeating the question ever since. It is one of those questions the discussion of which is practically destitute of result. Whether the answer be in the affirmative or in the negative, as it was in the days of Noah so it will continue in every age, men will marry and women will be given in marriage, and settle the question for themselves by actual experiment. Though the question is destitute of result as far as the prevention of marriage is concerned, it has a marked influence on the manner in which the marriage bond is regarded. There are some sentiments which cannot be discussed without being thereby degraded ; there are some instincts

which cannot be questioned without thereby being imperilled. When the marriage bond is discussed, as though it were a legal contract, an institution which Nature has ordained is degraded into a partnership which Society has recognised. When the indissoluble connection between the parents is called in question, the family life is imperilled. It would considerably purify the atmosphere and elevate the tone of society if the essential distinction between the ideal and the actual were kept well in view. The language of the actual can never interpret aright the thought of the ideal. The thought of the actual can never be accurately translated into the language of the ideal. The two are on different planes, the dimensions of the one cannot be applied to the other. Marriage is an ideal, but there is also an actual. Considerations which are of supreme moment to the one are inapplicable to the other. Deductions which are legitimate from the one are ruled out of court in the other. The idealist speaks gibberish to the actualist, and the actualist speaks jargon to the idealist. Discussion therefore is impossible between them. We either believe in the unseen ideal and look forward to its realisation, or we accept the actual and either hope for or despair of its improvement. It is not a different point of view, but a different power of vision, which separates the one from the other. The actualist sees the present, but is blind to the

future ; the idealist sees the future, and disregards the present. To the former the actual is the real, to the latter the ideal is the real. The question between them is not one for argument, it is one of individual choice. Having made their choice they henceforth live on different planes and talk a different language.

It is said that experience confers the right to speak and inexperience imposes the obligation to keep silence. This, however, is one of those maxims which are only half truths. It is applicable on the plane of the actual, but not on the plane of the ideal. Insight gives a greater right to speak than experience. The man who can see is as great an authority at least as the man who can only feel. Christ had no experience of married life, yet He was consulted on the question of divorce. His pronouncement is not based upon experience, yet it is full of true insight. The Pharisees who came to Him with this question of divorce were as usual inspired with the wish to entrap the Teacher, rather than to be enlightened by Him. Probably the fate of John the Baptist was in their minds, and they took advantage of the presence of Christ in Herod's dominions to involve Him in pronouncing a similar condemnation of the king's immorality. They concealed their real object, however, by asking the question of the schools—May a husband on any account divorce his wife? It

was a question upon which Rabbinical opinion was divided into two hostile camps, so that even if He avoided the political danger by an affirmative answer, He would incur the enmity of the stricter and more religious section of the community.

Christ is indifferent to all such considerations. He answers the question as though He had been asked in perfect sincerity. He was familiar with the looseness with which the marriage bond was regarded, and His desire to impart truer ideas was greater than any wish to escape personal danger. His answer is the answer of the idealist. He ignores the actual, and points to the ideal as alone furnishing the true conception of the institution. He goes beyond the Law of Moses, around which the discussion in the schools centred, to the law of Him who made man and constituted him as he is. The bond is not a social union, it is a natural institution. It must be interpreted, not by man's custom, but by his constitution. "Have you not read," He answers, "that He who made man, made him from the very beginning not single but double, two halves of one whole. Moreover," He said further, "that for that very reason a man shall leave his father and his mother and be united to his wife, and the two halves shall become one whole. They are therefore no longer two, but one. What therefore God has united, let not man separate." Man and woman are not two wholes,

but complements of one unity, and marriage is the completion of the prophecy, the realisation of the ideal. 'The completion of the union is a new life from which new relationships arise'. No law can annul the relationships to which marriage gives rise. The son is for ever a son, the daughter for ever a daughter. It is because the relationships to which marriage gives rise are unalterable that the bond is indissoluble. Marriage is the establishment of a new family, and on that account the man leaves his father and his mother, and in union with his wife establishes a new home, a fresh centre of family life. Nature looks to the welfare of the race, and her institutions must be interpreted in the light of the goal she has fixed her eye upon. The union of man and woman is not therefore the establishment of a partnership, it is the institution of a relationship, and once instituted it cannot be dissolved. The union has been foreseen and provided for in the constitution of man's being, and once consummated no human law can dissolve it. In marriage fancy has been translated into fact, and the fact abides however much the fancy may change. Law can recognise facts, but it cannot alter them. On the plane of the actual the childless marriage may seem to be a less real union, but on the plane of the ideal the union is just as real. The new relationships to which marriage gives rise are derived from the original relationship which

marriage institutes. The derivative may confirm the original, but its absence cannot annul it. On the plane of the ideal the relationship of the wife to the husband and the husband to the wife which their union has constituted is no less sacred and real though no new relationships are derived from it.

Christ's method of dealing with the question is entirely different from anything which the Pharisees had anticipated. All their discussion gathered round the interpretation of legal phraseology, the exposition of the Law of Moses. They find themselves suddenly referred to the law written by the finger of God in man's constitution, instead of to the law written by the fingers of Moses. The question is not decided on the lines of the permissible, but on the lines of the possible. The question is not, *May* a man divorce his wife, but, *Can* he, and the answer is the one word, Impossible. God has joined them together and man cannot separate them. The entry has been made in the Court of Nature, and no Court of Law can erase it. The Pharisees are nonplussed at the nature of the reply. They are surprised, but they quickly perceive that it gives them a better opportunity than they expected. It brings Him into opposition, not to one of the schools of the Rabbis but to both, not merely to Herod's act but also to Moses' Law. "Why then," they ask, returning to the purpose

with which they had first put the question, "did Moses command the husband to give his wife a written document of divorce, and so put his wife away?"

The true significance of Christ's answer is frequently lost sight of, and its bearing on the question of inspiration is almost entirely ignored. It is impossible, however, in the face of His answer to this apparent conflict between one part of Scripture and another, to avoid believing that Christ recognised what in these days we are accustomed to call the progressiveness of revelation, and a difference in the degree of inspiration. "On account of the stubbornness of human nature, and the hardheartedness of men, Moses permitted the putting away of the wife, but the conception of divorce is not contained in the initial institution of marriage." Revelation must of necessity be adapted to the capacity of the hearer. Legislation cannot be too far in advance of the age. In judging of Scripture due regard must be paid to the time and the circumstances in which it was produced. Language itself is not in advance of human nature, it grows with its growth and is refined with its refinement. Moses dealt with the actual, and sought to raise it in the direction of the ideal which man's constitution prophesies. He had to deal with men who were more akin to the animal than the spiritual. In the interest of the too easily and too frequently discarded wife, he

sought to replace desertion by a formal divorce, to substitute law for anarchy. He sought, that is, to regulate what he could not forbid. He had to speak in a language which was adapted to the low attainments of his people. His authority was over the actual, not over the ideal. Marriage, however, is an ideal, and its true nature must be sought, not in human institutes, but in the divine constitution of man's nature. That ideal relation makes no provision for divorce. Legislation may substitute divorce for desertion, but it has no authority to change the marriage bond into a social contract. The actual may be elevated in the direction of the ideal, but the ideal cannot be lowered in the direction of the actual. Of the two evils, desertion and divorce, the latter may be the less, but it is still an evil and not a good. There is always an appeal from man's perception to God's conception,—“It has not been so from the beginning.” • The improvement in the actual which Moses enjoined cannot take the place of the ideal which God enacted. That they may be under no doubt as to His view of the question they have brought forward, Christ proceeds to give a categorical denial of the rightness of divorce. “I say definitely,” He goes on to say, “that whoever puts away his wife, for any reason except that of her unfaithfulness, and marries another woman, commits adultery.” The ceremony does not alter the facts, it can do nothing more than recognise

them. The first ceremony simply recognised that the two are one, a second ceremony cannot alter that fact. The only fact which the second ceremony recognises is that the married party is living with another. To the actualist such a statement may seem fanciful, to the idealist it is actual fact. The Pharisees retired to make what use they might of the answer they had received. They had not come to learn, and therefore the lesson made no impression upon them. With the disciples, however, it is different, and they turn the matter over in their minds as they follow their Master home.

In the privacy of the house they give expression to the conclusion at which they have arrived. "If this is the true nature of the marriage relationship, they say, it is surely better not to marry at all." The ideal is so high as to be unattainable, and therefore it is prohibitive. If, while human nature is what it is, divorce is not permissible, then in their judgment marriage is impossible. This is ever the reply of the actualist when confronted with the ideal. "True but impracticable, beautiful but unattainable." It is but a step to the rejection of the ideal and the acceptance of the actual. Marriage as an ideal would doubtless be a success, but marriage as an actual is frequently a failure. Theory is one thing, but practice is another. Divorce may be theoretically wrong, but it is practically necessary. If it is not right it is at least expedient. This step at which the disciples

hesitated, the world has no scruples in taking. It fails to see that if marriage is a failure, divorce is no remedy. Acquiescence in the actual never leads or can lead to the acquisition of the ideal. Facilities for divorce are not likely to make marriage a success. To betray the ideal by enthroning the actual, is not the method to secure its realisation. We may recognise and acknowledge that we are unequal to the attainment, but we have no right to make the measure of our attainment the standard of the ideal. Neither Moses nor any other legislator can alter man's constitution, he can but regulate human conduct. The true conception of the marriage relation, however, must be looked for, not amongst human customs, but in human nature, as that has been constituted by its Creator. The goal which evolution has in view, and not merely the stage at which she has arrived, must be taken into account if we would work in harmony with Nature's laws.

Christ remains the idealist in the face of the actual. He recognises, however, the weakness of human nature, though He does not acquiesce in it. "It is not every one," He says in reply to the remark of the disciples, "who can make room in his thought for such an ideal, but only those on whom special grace has been bestowed." To follow the ideal, to refuse to accept the actual, to sacrifice oneself for the sake of the ideal,—these are

not signs of the generality, they are the hall-mark of the elect. There are some cases of abstinence from marriage, the explanation of which is not to be sought either in lack of inclination or in deficiency of feeling, but in the intense devotion to the ideal, which appears incapable of realisation. Let the man who has perceived the ideal retain it. Let the man who sees that from its very nature marriage is an indissoluble bond refuse to entertain the conception of divorce. If in his case marriage has proved a failure, let him not look to divorce to make it a success. For the sake of upholding the ideal, let him refuse at all costs to stoop to the actual. The sacredness of family life, which divorce destroys, is of more consequence than the satisfaction of personal inclination, for which it is intended to provide. A desolate home is preferable to a desertion of the ideal. To the idealist no sacrifice is too great which preserves the ideal, no gratification will satisfy which sacrifices it.

The disciples doubtless felt that this was a hard saying,—Who could hear it? The world feels that it is an impossible saying and rejects it. Time, however, is always on the side of the ideal, and history is a persistent condemnation of the actual. Legislation which provides facilities for divorce inevitably lowers the conception of the marriage relationship, and thereby tends to produce the failure it has anticipated. The offered remedy, instead of preventing, increases the disease.

Divorce is no remedy ; it is the publication of failure, and the destruction of the last hope of success. It does not, however, merely indicate the failure of the parties concerned, it stamps every marriage with the mark of a licensed partnership. It brands with the stigma of a temporary connection that which is essentially a permanent union. It sacrifices the welfare of the race for the sake of the individual, the sacredness of family life for personal gratification. Christ recognises the hardship which may be inflicted upon the individual ; He does not minimise the sacrifice which the ideal demands, but He appeals to the sanctity of the ideal, and to the idealist the appeal is never in vain.

XVI

SACRIFICE AN ESSENTIAL TO COMPLETENESS

Matt. xix. 16-30 ; Mark x. 17-22 ; Luke xviii. 18-30.

THERE is a type of character which presents all the appearance of excellence, and possesses qualities which are in every respect admirable, but which nevertheless fails to win the confidence and approval to which it seems entitled. We can find nothing upon which we can fasten to account for the impression produced, there is no definite trait which calls forth our aversion, yet we have the feeling that the face value is not the real value. We do not for a moment suspect any hypocrisy, for there is an evident sincerity which impresses us with the sense of reality. We are not conscious even of any particular defect which would account for the feeling we entertain, and yet we have a suspicion that something is needed to give warmth and colour to what we instinctively feel to be beautiful but cold, real but not deep, genuine but not complete. It is like the coin which we can easily distinguish from the counterfeit, and yet

which for some reason or other does not ring true. There is a flaw somewhere we know, but we cannot detect it; there is something lacking, but we cannot say what. Such characters will pass for years with the flaw unknown to themselves and unperceived by others. Some crisis in their own lives, or the keener insight of a greater soul, is needed to reveal the defect. The young ruler who sought an interview with Christ was a character of this type. •

He was a man of wealth, for he had great possessions; he was a man of position, for he was a ruler of the Jews. His private and public character were beyond reproach, for he had kept the commandments from his youth up. He had the attractiveness of genuine worth which calls forth affection, for when Jesus saw him He loved him. Despite his excellences, however, he was dissatisfied, and of too earnest a disposition to rest content with anything short of the highest. He felt that there was a life richer than he possessed, an inheritance with a more lasting tenure than that which had come to him from his ancestors, a satisfaction deeper and more abiding than any he had as yet obtained. Kindred souls are mutually attracted, and the love which Christ felt for the young ruler was the response of the heart of Christ to the young man's love for Himself. The Prophet of Nazareth had won the affection and secured the enthusiastic admiration of the young

ruler of the Jews. The impulsiveness of youth and the enthusiasm of the ardent admirer are both evidenced in the manner of his approach. His eagerness overpowers his sense of personal dignity, and he comes running to the place of meeting. His warm admiration for the Prophet of God makes him oblivious of the esteem to which he was accustomed from his official position, and he kneels at the feet of Jesus.

A question often throws as much light upon the pupil's character as it does upon his style of thinking, and this is especially the case with a moral or spiritual question. The same question may be asked with very different motives, and may betray a very different type of mind. A different answer is demanded according to the character of the questioner. The expert physician often gains as much, or even more, from his patient's manner of describing his symptoms than he does from the description itself. The teacher will more often understand his pupil's difficulty by taking notice of the terms in which he states it than from the statement itself. "Good Rabbi, what good thing shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" A man's adjectives are often more characteristic than his nouns. His verbs are more significant than his substantives. His nouns are names for common objects which he is more or less forced to use; his adjectives are the distinguishing marks he places upon them, and

reveal his individuality. His substantives are the pieces on the chess-board, his verbs are the movements he effects with them and reveal the thought which directs them. "*Good* Rabbi, what *good* thing shall I do that I may *inherit* eternal life?" The adjective is significant, its repetition is suggestive. The verb is indicative of the man. The adjective is evidently a favourite and familiar word, it is applied indiscriminately to persons and things. Familiarity, however, does not necessarily imply intimacy, and the indiscriminate use of a word generally denotes an indifferent acquaintance with its meaning. There is the suggestion of a superficial knowledge of men in the phrase, Good Rabbi, which is characteristic of a man who has no deep insight into character, and there is the indication of a shallowness of thought in the conception of some good thing to be done to obtain the life he needs, which betrays very little acquaintance with the deeper meaning of the eternal life he seeks. The verb, inherit, similarly points out the inadequacy of his conception, and betrays the man to whom much has been given, but from whom as yet little has been required. His conception of the moral ideal must be deepened if he is to become conscious of the lack in his nature. His mind must be turned from the thought of some definite thing to be accomplished which will secure for him a great inheritance, if he is to enter upon the deeper and higher

life for which he craves. It is the perception of the relation of the good to God which transforms morality into religion; it is the possession of a spirit, not the performance of an act, which enriches a man with the life which is eternal.

Christ's answer is intended to direct the young man's attention to the true source of that higher life which he seeks, and to correct his mistaken conception of the means by which it is to be obtained. His conception of the good is very little more than that of a kindly disposition, a well-meaning intention. He has the surface knowledge which is associated with the adjective, not the deeper knowledge involved in the noun. He means nothing by the expression, Good Rabbi, beyond ordinary politeness; he has no greater conception in the use of the term, good thing, than some act of kindness which one in his position and with his wealth can easily accomplish. "Why," asks Christ in reply, "do you attach the adjective to the noun? Why do you call me Good Rabbi? What does the term signify to you, what value do you attach to the conception of the Good? There is none good but One, even God. The Good is a much bigger conception than you have yet realised. In its perfection it is found only in God, and the only substantive to which the adjective can be rightly attached is God. Though it is a common word in your vocabulary, you have not yet

grasped its meaning. The kindly disposition and the well-meaning intention which have been the characteristics of your nature must have deeper roots if they are to develop into that moral and spiritual life which you are seeking. In the same way you are too familiar with the idea of acquisition by means of inheritance. You are not sufficiently acquainted with the only true method of obtaining possession by personal effort. Put your ideas to the test. You think life eternal can be gained by the performance of some definite action; well, you are acquainted with the commandments—what more do you want? If the deeper life you crave is to be obtained in the way you suppose, the decalogue furnishes you with not one, but many good actions, which you can do.” Christ’s answer is intended to enable the man to see that his thought is not deep enough, his apprehension is not keen enough, nor his life strenuous enough for the task which lies before him. The teacher’s work is to stimulate thought rather than to furnish it, to enable the pupil to see his mistake for himself, not merely to tell him he is wrong. Deeply rooted in the man’s mind is the idea that the richer life of whose need he is dimly conscious can be gained as easily as his own possessions have come to him, or with the exercise of as little effort as he has hitherto been accustomed to put forth. Of great wealth and occupying a good position, life has been easy for

him, and has made no demands upon him. He is conscious that something is lacking, but he thinks that all he needs to know is the secret by which it can be obtained and the rest will be easy.

He seizes with avidity the reference in Christ's answer to the commandments. He thinks that more than half the task is accomplished. Eagerly and joyfully he replies, "All these have I kept from my youth up; what lack I yet?" If the path lies in that direction, then he is familiar with it, and in fact has already gone a very long way on the road. He is conscious, however, that it has not yielded the entire satisfaction he needs, something additional is needed. There is some one thing more which has to be done and the prize is his.

There is a charm about youthful enthusiasm, and a fascination in the eagerness with which the young anticipate the future, confident in their ability for great tasks, which cannot fail to call forth our love and sympathy, even though we may fear the result of the trial which awaits them. There was a winsomeness about the young ruler's face and a sincerity in his manner which appealed to Christ, and looking into the upturned face radiant with hope and glowing with enthusiasm, His heart went out to him. There is a kindly smile of approval on the face, but a touch of sadness in the voice, as Christ replies, "One thing

is wanting to complete your character. If you wish to be complete, go and sell all you possess, and distribute your wealth among the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and then come and follow Me." There was the outline of a noble character, but one thing was missing to complete the picture and give it the warmth and colour of life. The features were perfect and beautifully outlined, but the eyes lacked depth and the mouth needed firmness. The convictions were right, but they were not deeply rooted; the disposition was excellent, but it needed fixing; the desires were praiseworthy, but they wanted transforming into passions of the soul. "No heart is pure that is not passionate; no virtue is safe that is not enthusiastic." What the man needed to complete his character was a great consuming passion; what he required to develop the intrinsic goodness of his nature was a self-abandonment. The depths of his nature had never been stirred, his hidden resources had never been called forth. Life had made no demands upon him, his soul had never been thrilled by the appeal of some high deed or noble cause. The even tenor of his life had never been disturbed by either a great temptation or a great misfortune. His virtue was a disposition of the mind, not a conviction of the soul; his freedom from vice was rather the result of inertia, than of the controlling force of the passion for righteousness.

There was something lacking to complete his nature. Something was needed to give direction to his life and decision to his character. His bosom was a lake whose surface had known nothing but the ripples of the soft zephyr. The effect of the lashing of a great storm of passion, whether for good or ill, was an unknown quantity. A sudden temptation which stirred the depths of his being, or a mighty passion which enraptured his soul, might either mar or make the man. With a divine compassion and the tenderest solicitude for the young man's moral welfare, Christ offers him the ministry of a great sacrifice, and the saving influence of a great devotion. "Sell all you possess, and come and follow Me." Inherited wealth had made life too easy for him, and prevented the discovery of the hidden resources and capabilities of his nature. Affluence had made it easy for him to love his neighbour, if not as much as himself, at least as well as himself, and the distribution of a generous charity had satisfied his sense of responsibility for his fellows. He needed to realise that goodness means more than good-nature, and that the service of man is more than almsgiving. His life hitherto had been aimless and purposeless, inclination had been his only leader. He needed an all-absorbing aim, and a leader who secured an all-compelling devotion. It was no mere increase in almsgiving which Christ recommended ; it was the renuncia-

tion of all adventitious aids which he demanded. In mere almsgiving there was no virtue by means of which he might expect to obtain as a reward the life that was life indeed, but in the renunciation of all that he possessed there was a determination of character which would inevitably produce that deepening of his life which is the prophecy of its continuance and permanence. The call to forsake the settled and ordered life to which he had been accustomed, and take up the wandering life of an itinerant, was not an intensification of the aimless wandering of inclination, the life of a mere Bohemian ; it was the persistent following of an ideal, the passionate devotion of a pupil to a Great Master.

It is no wonder that the call found him unprepared, that the demand was more than he felt able to supply. The *one* thing which he was to do proved to be an endless labour, the acquisition of the inheritance was a life-long task. The eager look passed from his face, and the shadow of a great disappointment darkened his brow. For the first time he found his resources insufficient to secure the object of his desire. He discovered that there were some things which money, however plentiful, could not buy ; that there were possessions which could not be inherited, but must be earned. He turned away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. The great testing had come, the clouds which portended a great storm had already

gathered, and soon the placid bosom of the lake would be heaving and swelling under the stress and strain of a mighty tempest. He would never be the same man again. The depths of his nature had at last been stirred, and the effect of the storm must give him a deeper peace than he had ever known before, or intensify the unrest which he had already experienced. He goes away sorrowful but not resentful, disappointed but not affronted. The struggle must take place alone; the decision must be his own. With intense sympathy, but with a hopeful anticipation, Christ follows him with a look of love, and turning to the disciples, gives expression to both His sympathy and His hope in the words, "With how hard a struggle will the possessors of wealth enter the kingdom of God." The little barque is in the grip of a mighty storm, but its timbers are sound, and though the struggle will leave its marks upon hull and rigging, it will reach its desired haven at last.

XVII

AN AMBITIOUS MOTHER

Matt. xx. 20-28 ; Mark x. 35-45.

THE true difference between seeing and believing is not that of knowledge as contrasted with imagination, it is the difference between sight and insight. Seeing is believing, is not a definition but a sarcasm, to which the appropriate retort is the counter-assertion, believing is seeing. A truer definition would be that seeing is the perception of the real, while believing is the perception of the ideal. Sight presents us with the actual; faith with the ideal. Sight gives us a photograph of the building operations, with no more of the edifice than has been actually completed. Faith gives us the plan and sections and elevations of the architect's drawing. If the drawing were never made, the building would never be erected. If there were no idealisation by the mind of man, there would be no realisation by the hand of man. Faith in man is not a new creation, it is an evolution. Nature herself is as much an idealist as

man. She also plans before she builds, designs before she constructs. She starts all her children in life with a plan of the work she expects from them ; while to the more intelligent she gives a sight of the ideal,—that insight into her larger purposes which inspires them to strive for a higher and richer life. The theory of evolution has not changed our various positions, it has simply cleared away some of the mists by which we were surrounded. The Materialist is a Materialist still, and the Idealist is an Idealist still. It has not given faith to the man who had none, nor has it taken the faith away from the man who had. Each looks out upon the world from his own hill-top, corrects a few of his old mistakes, verifies some of his old impressions, and readjusts his vision. Though we call things by different names, we have to deal with them as they are, and they sooner or later correct our mistakes, even though they fail to alter our prejudices. In the interests of our scientific theories we banish the word faith from our vocabulary, but we none the less use the thing every day of our lives. In the interests of our creeds we anathematise the word rationalism, but we make use of our reason none the less, and regard as irrational every opinion from which we dissent. The Rationalist believes, and the Believer reasons ; the Realist has his ideals, and the Idealist faces the actual. We are all children of our common mother, Nature, whatever training and

education we may have received. It is in her language we think, in whatever speech we may express ourselves. It is the instincts we have inherited from her which mould our lives, whatever opinions we may hold.

One of the greatest instincts which we thus inherit is the aspiration after a richer and a higher life. We are all idealists by nature, whatever we may call ourselves in later life. To her great gift of sight, Nature has added more or less of insight. To the consciousness of what we are, she gives us more or less of a revelation of what we may become. To the desire to live, she adds the aspiration after that fuller life she has in store for us. She gives us the foresight by which we are able to see the attainable and desire it, but she graciously withholds the farsight which would reveal all the difficulties in the attainment. From the mountain peak of our knowledge of the actual we are able to see the dazzling peak of the ideal, but between us, wrapped in the thick mists of the future, lies the valley of realisation. We know what will satisfy our aspiration long before we see how the satisfaction is to be obtained or realise the difficulties there are in the way. Faith in the ideal precedes the sight of the real, even as anticipation precedes realisation. While farsight would paralyse all effort after advancement, foresight is the *sine qua non* of all progress. If we saw all the way which lies between the actual we have

attained to, and the ideal we aspire to, we should never undertake the journey. If the distant peak of the ideal were wrapped in impenetrable cloud, we should never aspire to ascend. From the Palace Beautiful we must be able to see the Delectable Mountains, though the Valley of Humiliation be covered with the mists which shut out the trials that await us.

The interview between Christ and the mother of Zebedee's children is an illustration of the sight of the ideal with that ignorance of the means by which alone it is attainable, which is characteristic of human nature. The mother had caught a glimpse of the place at the right and left hand of the King in His glory, which her sons might perchance occupy, but she was in ignorance of the cup of suffering and the baptism of sorrow by which it was alone attainable. Of the woman herself we know nothing directly, but much indirectly. She was one of those women who are insignificant in themselves, but illustrious in their relationships. They are neither deficient in character nor lacking in individuality, but their character, like a photographic negative, needs printing before its beauty is evident, and their individuality needs another life upon which to leave its impress before it is perceptible. Of the woman herself we are not even certain of her name. It is as Zebedee's wife, and notably as the mother of his children, that she is known to us.

Whatever greatness she possessed came out, not as the woman, but as the wife and mother. She doubtless had both character and individuality, for the two sons are sufficient evidence of that. Her character, however, developed as wife and mother, and her individuality stamped itself upon her two sons. Hers was no self-contained or self-centred life. Her relations to her husband and children absorbed all her thought, so that she had none for herself. She asks for no honour for herself, but only for her sons. The highest and best appeal to her nature, but her ambition expresses itself in bringing forward her children. The personal diffidence and modesty which keep the sons in the background are unfelt by her, for she is pleading for her boys and not for herself.

As she comes forward, the intensity of her desire is stamped upon her face, and expresses itself in the lowly attitude she assumes, and the humble prostration of the woman of the East. That she has a great favour to ask is evident as much from her own eagerness as from her sons' reluctance. She is a true Eastern woman in the indefiniteness with which she first states her request, hoping to secure a promise beforehand, to which she may afterwards appeal when the greatness of her petition produces the anticipated hesitation. In answer to the kindly, "What is it that you wish?" with which Christ replies to her vague request, she at length makes known

the high ambition she cherishes for "her sons. "Command that these my two sons shall sit, one at your right hand and the other at your left, in your kingdom." She is an ambitious woman, but her motherhood has made her unselfish. She aspires to the highest, she aims at the stars. Nothing short of the highest will satisfy her, but it is for her boys and not for herself that she pleads. If she can attain for them the place next the King, she is content to prostrate herself in the dust at His feet. With a true mother's pride in her sons, she has no doubt as to their qualifications. Like a true woman of the East, she has equally no doubt as to the ease with which the King can grant her request. A word from Him and the position is theirs : He has but to command and it is done. It is the peak of the ideal bathed in the glory of sunshine, upon which her eyes are fixed. The valley of realisation, in which is the Gethsemane of agony, and the Golgotha of a shameful death, are mercifully hidden from her sight. The mother's eyes can perceive a future for her sons which fills her heart with joy. The future of attainment through which the sons will have to pass would break her heart. If the mother has no foresight, the sons have no future. If the mother has no aspirations for her children, the children receive no inspiration from the mother. She must see enough to inspire them, not too much to daunt them.

Christ is touched by the mother's earnestness ; her lofty but unselfish ambition, coupled as it is with so much simplicity, moves His compassion. He sees His own mother's face glowing with pride and joy, and He foresees that same face smitten with grief as she stands at the cross weeping. There is infinite tenderness in His voice as He answers, " Ye know not what ye ask." The disciples see nothing but an overweening ambition, and their faces reveal the condemnation they would fain express. Christ sees a noble aspiration worthy of all commendation, and His face reflects the approval He feels. He sees also, however, the answer to the mother's prayer, the baptism and the cup which await her sons, and His face is transfigured with a Divine compassion. What mother ever can foresee the strange answers which await her prayers ! If she knew all that her prayer means, her heart would fail her, and the prayer would never be uttered. With a tender sympathy for the mother's hopes, He turns to the candidates for high office whom she has brought forward. Their faces are flushed with eager anticipation, the possibilities of greatness are perceptible, character is indicated rather than defined. They are promising recruits from whom good service may be expected, rather than veterans to whom rewards must be given. " Can you drink of the cup from which I am about to drink ?" He asks. " The campaign is before you, the kingdom has yet to be

won. It is not ministers whom I want for high offices, but soldiers for active service. It is a desperate enterprise calling for heroic effort which lies before you, not a triumphal procession. Can you face the rigours of the campaign, can you follow in the forlorn hope, can you shed your blood for the King, and if need be lay down your life in His cause? Can you follow Him through the desperate charge, stand by Him in the hour of apparent defeat and ruin which awaits Him? To stand by His side in the thick of the fight, to abide with Him in the hour of defeat when all have forsaken Him and fled—these are the positions which are possible to you. Can you occupy these?" With the ardour of youthful enthusiasm and the confidence of inexperience they eagerly answer, "We can." The spirit is undoubtedly willing, though the future may show that the flesh is weak. Campaigns, however, are more often won by the willingness of the spirit than lost by the weakness of the flesh. The flesh may be responsible for the loss of a battle, but it is the spirit to which the success of the campaign is due. Yes! these men are able. They are but recruits, and they will run at the first battle, but there is the stuff in them of which veterans are made. They will sleep at their post as sentries while their Leader is passing through the agony of Gethsemane. The sight of spear and helmet as the Roman guard marches into the garden will throw them into dismay, and

before a blow is struck they will flee as arrant cowards. All this true, and yet there is a latent courage and a potential tenacity of purpose which shall yet justify the confidence with which they reply, "We can."

Christ recognises the truth of the assertion, and accepts the willingness of the spirit, though He knows full well the weakness of the flesh. He sees the veteran in the recruit; He foresees the triumph of the spirit over the flesh, and overlooks the temporary triumph of the flesh over the spirit. As He gives the recruit his knapsack, He hides in it the Marshal's baton. "You shall indeed drink of My cup, and be baptized with My baptism, for that is possible to you; but the seat at My right hand and at My left, it is not for Me to allot, but it will be bestowed upon those for whom it has been prepared by My Father." Service can be promised, but position must be earned. The cross can be placed upon our shoulders, but the crown must be won. The travail is here, the satisfaction is there. The ideal which is seen from afar must be realised before it can be possessed, and its realisation involves a Gethsemane and a Calvary. The place at the right hand is not granted as the result of the mother's prayer, it is given as the result of the son's agony. It is not a favour bestowed for the asking, it is an honour awarded for merit. It is reserved for those for whom it is prepared; it

is prepared for those by whom it is deserved. Nature inspires all her children with the desire for the higher place and the increased power, but she awards the prize to those only who have struggled for the richer and fuller life. It is the elect alone who triumph, and for them the place has been reserved.

The other ten disciples heard and were indignant at the presumption of the two. They were rivals for place and position, not competitors for service. It was jealousy of the two, not zeal for arduous service, which stirred them. They coveted the seat, not the cup. Christ heard their loud voices and angry tones, and calling them to Him, explained the meaning of true greatness and the duties of high office. In the kingdoms of the world high position means self-importance, and greatness means self-aggrandisement, but it must not be so among you. Be ambitious for the highest, but understand what the highest means. Strive after greatness, but realise what true greatness is. In the kingdom of heaven the higher the position the greater the service. The prince in position is the bond-slave in service, just as the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, not to preserve His own life, but by the sacrifice of Himself to save the world.

XVIII

A LITTLE MAN WITH A LARGE HEART

Luke xix. 1-10.

LIFE is full of surprises, and human nature is a bundle of apparent inconsistencies. Great men often manifest unaccountable meanness, and little men as frequently surprise us with true greatness. The heroic soul has its moments of cowardice, and the coward his moments of heroism. The influence of environment at one time appears to be all-powerful, at another it seems to be utterly ineffective. The man whose training and profession prophesy one thing will suddenly astonish us with a display of the opposite. The man whose individuality is so pronounced as to seem to be beyond the reach of external circumstances, will all at once fall a victim to their influence. Rules and maxims which are the generalisations of the widest experience, and the result of generations of observation, are almost as frequently falsified as verified. We are compelled to admit that many of our commonest proverbs are only

half-truths, and that the other half almost justifies the inversion of the proverb. The explanation is probably to be found in the fact that human nature is not simple but complex, not a single but a double. There is the ordinary, much-in-evidence self, and a self which may be called the subliminal self. The one usually lives on the ground floor, answers the bell, and attends to callers ; the other lives upstairs and spends most of his time in dreaming. The most frequent callers at the house, tradesmen and visitors, are well acquainted with the one, but hardly know of the other's existence. It is the latter, however, who is the real proprietor. As a rule he leaves matters of merely mundane or diurnal interest to the dweller on the ground floor, and is indifferent to any complications due to his indolence that may arise in the household affairs. Occasionally, however, he descends to the lower apartments, and there asserts himself. On such occasions he may himself answer the door, and then perhaps the visitor will receive a reception as unexpected as it is startling. As Stevenson has so graphically depicted in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, every man is more or less of a contradiction. The ordinary and the subliminal self are not doubles except in appearance, in nature and disposition they are often the exact opposite of each other. The ordinary self is the active partner in the firm, the subliminal self is as a rule the sleeping partner.

It is only when the firm is passing through some crisis that the sleeping partner is seen or his influence felt.

The sudden conversion of Zaccheus is a case of the awakening of the subliminal self and its sudden assumption of the reins of government. The ordinary self was Zaccheus the publican, the subliminal self was Zaccheus the son of Abraham. He was an Ishmael by training and profession, his hand against every man and every man's hand against him, but he was a son of Abraham by birth. His neighbours and acquaintances knew only the publican who answered the door, and never dreamed of the son of Abraham within. They saw the littleness and meanness of the publican, and despised him accordingly. When they called at the big house in which the rich customs officer lived, it was the little man with the mean appearance and the dirty hands who opened the door and took their cards. The great man with the stamp of nobility upon him was not at home, and they were oblivious of his existence. They called at the house as seldom as possible, and confined their conversations to the conventions. It was at his office that they knew Zaccheus best, and in the transactions they had with him they generally came off second best. All the time, however, there was another Zaccheus living alone in the great house, dreaming his dreams and seeing his visions. Visible to the ordinary eye was the

publican sitting at the receipt of custom and waiting for his dues ; invisible, but none the less real, was the devout Jew waiting for the consolation of Israel.

Man is a social animal, and where the social instinct is confined within a narrow channel the stream runs deepest. The publican found himself shunned by the ordinary Jew, and therefore he naturally drew towards those who were similarly treated. The feast must be given, and if those who are invited refuse to come, the highways and hedges must be searched to obtain the required guests. The publicans found themselves forced to seek society amongst their own class, and consequently they were probably well known to one another, even though their calling was carried on in different centres. We may therefore conclude that though Zaccheus was unacquainted with Christ, he was well known to Matthew, and had heard much from the disciple of the Master at whose call he had left all to follow Him. In preparation for His last great journey to Jerusalem, during which this interview between Christ and Zaccheus took place, Jesus had sent on in advance the seventy specially appointed disciples, to visit every town and village which He Himself intended to visit, to prepare for His coming. It is extremely likely that Matthew was one of the seventy, and therefore reasonable to conclude that if he was one of the two who visited Jericho

in advance, he would be most probably attracted to the house of his fellow-publican Zaccheus. There he would probably deepen the interest which Zaccheus already felt in the Prophet of Nazareth, and inform him of the intended visit which Christ purposed paying to his town. The knowledge of the ill-repute in which he was held by the people generally, is quite sufficient to account for Zaccheus giving no invitation to Matthew to bring the Master to his house. Zaccheus would never dream that the Prophet would be willing to stay with him during His visit to Jericho.

The news of Christ's approach was doubtless heard as Zaccheus was engaged in his public business, and aroused an intense desire within him to see this friend of the publican Matthew. What sort of a man could this Prophet of Galilee be that a publican could resign his lucrative office and become His disciple? He was at least a man worth looking at. The thronging crowds, however, hid Him from view, and the procession passed on without his being able to satisfy his curiosity. He became conscious of his littleness perhaps for the first time. The handicap of nature, however, can be overcome by artifice, and running on in advance of the crowd to a place where the procession must pass, he climbed up into a sycamore tree by the roadside, and eagerly awaited the arrival of the Master and His disciples. As they drew near Matthew's quick

eye detected his old friend, and he probably drew Christ's attention to the man about whom he had doubtless spoken on his return from his mission. This simple explanation of Christ's subsequent action not only makes the scene far more living and natural, but invests it with a richer meaning. Where a natural explanation is possible, a supernatural should never be supposed. It is not any abnormally keen sight on Christ's part, nor any supernatural knowledge of the name of a man whom He has never seen before, which are the significant features in the narrative. It is the insight into character and the knowledge of the man's nature which are the distinguishing features. The crowd saw nothing but a little man taking advantage of a good position to secure a better sight than his neighbours. Christ saw a great soul trying to overcome the disadvantages of birth and training. If the neighbours saw the symbolical at all, they passed by with the remark that it was just like the publican : what he could not gain in one way he would get in another—if not by fair means, then by foul. Christ saw the symbol and interpreted it with the sympathy of insight. Here was a man greater than his environment, a soul capable of high attainments, a nature susceptible to deep impressions. The man had been misjudged all his life, and his life had been a response to the false opinion expressed. The Jews had despised him, and he had made them pay for it in extortion ;

they had withheld from him what was his due, and he had made them pay more than they owed. They had appealed to the worst in his nature, and the worst had answered their expectations. They had treated him with scorn, and he had replied by treating their opinion with contempt. The true Zaccheus had retired more and more within the house, and left the management of his affairs to his major-domo. It was the true Zaccheus, however, who had come out that day, and seeing him, Christ stopped, and looking up, said, "Zaccheus, come down quickly, for I intend to stay at your house to-day."

With that sympathetic insight which characterised Him, Christ knows what the man really needs, and with the delicacy of fine sentiment expresses as His own sentiment what He knows Zaccheus wishes, but fears to ask. Instead of being perched up in a tree to get a passing glance, he shall sit at his own table with the Prophet at his right hand. In place of contempt and scorn, he shall know that One at least regards him as a friend, treats him as a man and not as a publican, recognises him as a son of Abraham and an heir of the promises.

Hastily Zaccheus descends, and, with a heart overflowing with the joy of unaccustomed respect, conducts Christ to his house. It is not the little man with the mean appearance and the dirty hands who meets the Prophet of Nazareth at the great

house. It is the proprietor himself who stands on the steps and welcomes his honoured guest. The crowd, however, cannot see the man for the publican. Their feelings are shocked, their sense of propriety outraged. "He is gone to be the guest of a man who is a notorious and hardened sinner," they exclaim in indignation. Zaccheus hears the contemptuous tones and the abusive words, but they do not affect the proprietor as they did the major-domo. He is indifferent to the reproach himself, for he feels that it is deserved, but he is anxious that none should reach his guest. "Here and now, Master," he says, turning to Christ, "I give half of my property to the poor, and if I have extorted money from any man, I restore fourfold." The real owner has at last been aroused, and has taken charge of his own affairs. The old major-domo is dismissed on the spot. In place of the mean, grasping hand of the publican, there is here the large-handed generosity of the human heart which feels for the poor. Instead of the extortion of the one, there is the liberal restitution of the other. The generosity of Christ has awakened generosity in Zaccheus; the appeal to the best in him has called forth the highest of which he is capable. The unmerited honour which Christ has bestowed upon him has made him suddenly deserving, and there is no house in Jericho more fitting to receive the Saviour of Israel than the house of Zaccheus, to which

salvation has veritably come. "To-day," Christ answers, "salvation has come to this house, seeing that he too is a son of Abraham." He has heard what the people said, as well as what Zaccheus has promised. This man has received not only the Prophet of Nazareth, but the salvation of Israel. "He has gone to be the guest of a notorious and hardened sinner." Why, they do not know their own townsman, though he has lived among them all his life! The so-called hardened sinner is giving half his goods to feed the poor. The grasping publican is restoring fourfold. He is showing a princely generosity and the righteousness of an Abraham. The old line is not extinct, for in the veins of Zaccheus is the blood of Abraham. There is even a ring in the voice of Zaccheus as he promises to restore fourfold which reminds us of his great ancestor answering the king of Sodom: "I will not take a thread nor a shoe-latchet, nor aught that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich." A son of Abraham he is, though there is a touch of the bondwoman as well. The freewoman's jealousy and scorn had turned him out of his home and made an Ishmael of him, with his hand against every man, and every man's hand against him. The royal blood, however, is in his veins, and the princely spirit was in his heart all the time. It needed but to be called forth, and the kingly generosity of One after the order of Melchizedek

had summoned it into activity. In going to be the guest of a man who was a hardened sinner, Christ had fulfilled the object of His mission, for He had come to seek and to save that which was lost. The younger son had come to himself, and was already in the Father's home. The elder brother might be angry if he chose, but the Father would find a sufficient answer in the fact that His son who was dead was alive again, His child who was lost was found.

XIX

A QUESTION OF AUTHORITY

Matt. xxi. 23-46 ; Mark xi. 27-33 ; Luke xx. 1-19.

FROM his earliest days man has been a labour-saving animal. This, in fact, has been his distinguishing feature, and one of the greatest factors in the progress he has made. He has invented instruments to save the labour of his hands, and constructed rules and formulas to save the labour of his head. Most of his superiority over the animal has come from this capacity, and he has been justly proud of the benefits it has conferred upon him. He has been compelled, however, to recognise that certain domains in which his activities have been engaged have persistently defied all attempts to dispense with either the work of his hands or the efforts of his brain. Art and Religion have more or less refused to be brought within the sphere of this labour-saving capacity. Pictures and poems cannot be turned out by machinery ; religious thought and feeling cannot be manufactured to order. They must be free

and spontaneous or they are lifeless, and being lifeless they are of necessity valueless. They must be stamped with individuality or they are worthless. When Art is fettered it becomes artificial; when Religion is regulated it becomes mere ritual. In the domain of Art the influence of a school must be educative, in the etymological meaning of that word. If it becomes tyrannical, it destroys the Art it was intended to foster. In the domain of Religion, when Ecclesiasticism, instead of fostering, fetters the life of the Church, it destroys the body it was meant to preserve; when systems and creeds, instead of stimulating, stifle thought and act as an anæsthetic upon feeling, they betray the faith they were designed to guard. Both Art and Religion are essentially manifestations of life, not articles of manufacture. If they are to be vital they must grow and develop, each after its kind, and not according to any superimposed pattern or model. They must absorb the light of inspiration, breathe the air of perfect freedom, and draw their nourishment from the rich soil of the emotions. What is true of the productions themselves is true of the criticism pronounced upon them. They must be judged, not by any conformity to preconceived canons and prescribed regulations, but solely on the ground of their possession of life—life which is true, and life which is beautiful. They are all alike attempts to realise the ideal, and therefore the true test of their value is not by

comparison with other attempts, but by the measure in which they approach the ideal. Each must be compared with the ideal,—that pattern which is only revealed on the Mount,—and therefore true criticism must never be stereotyped.

The two spheres of Art and Religion, however, represent a very small segment of the circle of human activity, and the Masters are the elect few of the race. While man has been compelled to regard these spheres as special preserves into which only the few could enter, he has not so readily recognised that the sphere of true criticism is similarly restricted, and the critic is equally an elect soul. The true critic no less than the true poet must be born, and not made. If the poem is an inspiration, the criticism must be a revelation. To such depths, however, has criticism been degraded and our conceptions debased, that the most worthless criticism is that which we characterise as inspired. Religion, however, has a much wider sphere than Art, since it is only the few who profess an interest in the latter; while all are more or less concerned with the former. For every art critic there are a thousand religious critics. The tendency therefore to apply regulations and rules in the judgment passed upon productions in the domain of religion has been far more widespread, and consequently far more mischievous. Select bodies have been established to whom has been remitted all criticism in the sphere of Religion, and whose judgments

have been accepted as final. These in turn have adopted their own regulations and standards by which to judge all the questions submitted to them, and have rigorously imposed their decisions on their followers. The result has invariably been the decay of all real life within the organisation, and the suppression of all attempts at revival. Religion, like Art, however, cannot be bound. Bonds are sooner or later broken asunder, the religious instincts of men recognise the living truth in spite of ban and censure. Authority which is assumed has to give place to the authority which is innate. The living voice is more potent than the dead hand. The body which arrogates to itself the right to question has itself to submit to the greater right of being questioned. If it cannot justify the authority it claims, it will receive no answer to the question it asks.

Christ's public entry into Jerusalem, followed by the cleansing of the Temple, and the open teaching within its sacred courts, naturally aroused the resentment of the religious authorities who felt themselves to be in supreme charge of the religious interests of their nation. Here was one who ignored their official position, invaded their special province, and taught without their special permission. They saw their power over the people slipping from their grasp, their place rocking beneath their feet, and their authority fast becoming a dead letter. This obscure provincial had

taken the capital by storm, and the people were following Him in crowds. Who was He, and what credentials could He produce? What right had He to the position He was taking? Whence did He derive the authority He was assuming? Filled with a sense of their own importance, and keenly sensitive to the due exercise of their authority, it was natural that they should demand credentials from one who acted as though He were beyond their jurisdiction. A deputation therefore of the chief priests and elders of the people came to Him as He was engaged in teaching in the Temple, and asked Him by what authority He was acting as He did, and who had given Him this authority. They were themselves accustomed to rely upon authority for everything they did. Religion to them was an elaborate ritual, minutely prescribed by recognised authorities. They regarded a teacher as one who had been definitely instructed in the schools, and duly licensed by the ruling authorities. They demanded therefore that He should justify His conduct and produce His credentials.

Christ replies by asking another question. His method, however, is by no means an evasion of a difficulty, it has a definite object in view. Their question is not meant to elicit information, it is a demand that He shall justify action which they repudiate. They do not come to Him to learn, they come to judge. They are not pupils but

examiners. His question therefore is directed to their qualifications for the position they have assumed. They have demanded His diploma; can they read it if it is shown them? They have asked for His authority; can they recognise one when they see it? They pose as examiners; have they passed any examination themselves in the subject about which they propose to question Him? "I also will ask you a question," He replies, "and demand an answer. When you have given the answer, I will tell you by what authority I act, and by whom I am accredited. The ministry of John the Baptist,—was it from heaven, or from men? Answer me that." They have questioned His authority, they shall first feel it. If they have a right to ask Him for His diploma, He has a right to find out whether they can decipher it. They profess to be able to judge the validity of His authority; let them first prove that they have recognised as valid an authority which they have already seen. They sent their deputations to the Baptist, and they received their answer. How did they read it? What did they make of him and his ministry? Had they recognised the King's seal and signature on the document the herald had brought them? If so, the credentials of Him whom the herald announced would be intelligible to them.

The challenge with which they were suddenly confronted could not be evaded. They had

assumed their robes of state, and arrayed themselves in the insignia of office. The people whose leaders they professed to be, and whose interests they were supposed to guard, were all around them waiting for their reply. Many in the crowd had caught a glimpse of the document the herald had produced, and had their own ideas of the treatment he had received. The haughty look on the faces of priests, and elders is exchanged for one of confusion and perplexity; the imperious tones give place to hurried whisperings. They find themselves on the horns of a dilemma, from which all their writhing and twisting will not extricate them. "From heaven," suggests one, only to be fiercely answered by another, "NO, NO, or He will say, Why did you not believe him?" "From men," whispers a second, only to be warned by another to beware of the stones of an exasperated mob. "They reasoned with one another," but were deaf to the still small voice of their own consciences. They recoiled from hearing the condemnation from His lips which the one answer was sure to produce; they shrank in abject cowardice from the hurtling stones of the people, which the other answer would just as certainly bring upon their unprotected heads. The Prophet whom they have despised calmly awaits their reply; the crowd in whose midst they stand is showing signs of impatience. In sullen tones they choose rather to confess their ignorance than encounter

His condemnation, or face an angry crowd of excited partisans of the Baptist. The answer, "We cannot tell," at length comes from their reluctant lips. They are compelled to confess that they have asked to see a document which they are unable to read. They have demanded to see a seal and a signature which when shown to them they cannot recognise. They have been brought face to face with a reality, and the tests which they have so constantly applied to shams are useless. They have demanded the authority for His ministry, and they are suddenly asked to give their judgment on the ministry of a man who has proved himself to be a prophet of God. They are asked what they know of real credentials, not of spurious imitations. They have asked for authority from man, and they are confronted with approval from God; they have asked to see a license from a human tribunal, and they are referred to a Divine commission which has already been presented to them. They come to examine, and they are forced to acknowledge that they have themselves failed to pass the preliminary examination. They are robed as leaders and guides of the people, and yet they cannot say what the least instructed in the crowd can tell them, namely, that John was a prophet sent from God.

Christ hears the words, but detects the falsehood which they conceal. Their answer is the lie dictated by shame and fear. Cannot ! let them say

what they mean,—will not! It is not that these chief priests and elders of the people cannot read, it is that they will not speak. It is not mental ignorance, but moral obliquity from which they are suffering. For the one He has infinite pity, for the other He has the scorn of a noble mind. If they were blind He could feel compassion; that they wilfully shut their eyes fills Him with indignation. They are not unable to answer, they are unwilling. He too can also be unwilling. “Neither will I tell you by what authority I act as I do.” Of what use is it to speak to ears which are wilfully shut, or to show to eyes which are wilfully closed? John’s credentials should have been a safe-conduct rendering his person inviolable, yet they had allowed him to be cruelly done to death at the instigation of an adulteress. With men who have so shamefully treated His messenger the Messiah will refuse to parley.

Christ has not yet done with them, however. They will not answer a plain and straightforward question, but an answer He means to extract from them. They have concealed their real thought under words of deceit, but He will get it out of them in spite of themselves. If they will not answer directly they shall do so indirectly. “What is your opinion,” He asks them, “of a case like this.” In one of those living pictures which He could sketch in a few sentences, He describes two sons asked to work in their father’s

vineyard, and whose answers reveal their very different dispositions. In the one there is the blank refusal followed by the better spirit of obedience, in the other the hypocritical spirit of professed willingness followed by wilful disobedience. "Which of the two," He suddenly asks them, "did the will of his father?" There is no whispered consultation now, and unsuspectingly they reply, "The first." They have committed themselves at last, and stand convicted out of their own mouths. "I solemnly assure you," Christ answers, "that the publicans and the harlots take precedence of you in entering the kingdom of heaven, which John announced, and in preparation for which his ministry was spent. He came to you in the way of that very ceremonial righteousness for which you profess so much reverence, and yet you would not believe him. The publicans and harlots, however, believed him; but as for you, even when you saw the example they set, you were not even afterwards sorry, so that you too might believe him to be a prophet of God." They have asked for His authority, and now they are beginning to feel it, in the uneasy prickings of conscience. He has another parable which they can turn over in their minds, and answer or not as they feel inclined. Again the steady and skilful hand rapidly traces the outline of a fresh scene. Another vineyard rises before their gaze, but this time a tragedy is being enacted. There are faces distorted

with rage, clubs are uplifted, and servants are fleeing for their lives. The scene changes and the heir himself approaches. There is a hurried consultation among the husbandmen, which ends in these usurpers of the son's inheritance seizing him and cruelly murdering him in cold blood. Once more a question is asked, "What then will the owner do to these professed dressers of his vineyard?" This time the chief priests and elders are anticipated by the crowd, whose feelings have been stirred by the recital of a dastardly crime, and they finish the story to their own satisfaction. "He will put the wretches to a miserable death, and give his vineyard to worthier men," they cry out. The temper of the crowd is sufficiently evident in their reply, and priest and elder congratulate each other with significant looks that they did not commit themselves in the matter of John's baptism. Turning to these professed builders of Sion, "Christ reminds them of the verse in the Psalms, 'The stone which the builders rejected is become the headstone of the corner,'" and warns them against the fate upon which they are heedlessly rushing. The rejected stone may prove a stumbling-block to the unwary, but it can also be used as a terrible missile crushing into dust the man against whom it is hurled. They may, if they will, reject the Messiah of promise, and deliver Him over to the Roman power to be crucified as a malefactor, but the awful fate of

Jerusalem is looming for themselves, If looks could have killed, He would there and then have shared the fate of the heir which He has so graphically described, but, they are cowards at heart. The temper of the crowd is too dangerous to be trifled with ; so for the present they must bide their time, and conceal as best they can the confusion with which He has covered them.

XX

PSUEDO-CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS

Matt. xxii. 15-22 ; Mark xii. 13-17 ; Luke xx. 20-26.

It is a mistake to suppose that words are common property which any one is entitled to use. Words are coins issued by different mints, and phrases are cheques on varied banks. There ought to be an unwritten, but none the less stringent law of copy-right in words, so that only those who can prove their right to them should be allowed to use them. To debase the current coin of thought is a greater crime than to debase the currency of the realm. If authors and pressmen, to say nothing of the general public, were liable to prosecution, how few would escape conviction. The reading public, however, ought to be sufficiently keen to detect the counterfeit coin, and shun the man who makes a literary profession by tampering with the currency of thought.* The cheque, however, cannot be so easily detected. It has to be presented for payment before it can be endorsed,—No effects. There are certain words and ideas which derive all their value from

the bank which issues them, and the man who has no account with the particular bank upon which the cheque is drawn, has no right to issue it. Cheques which are payable in the gold currency of moral and spiritual thought should not be received from men who have no account with the bank, or whose cheques are drawn on a bank with which it has no relations. One of the chief advantages of controversy is the collection of cheques and their presentation for payment. The much-talked-of controversy between religion and science would lose much of its bitterness if the religious writer who draws cheques which are only payable in the currency of scientific thought would send all such cheques to the proper bank, and be particularly careful not to overdraw his account. Similarly the scientific writer who draws cheques only payable in the currency of religious thought should be equally particular to see that he has a balance at the bank upon which his cheque is drawn. The two banks are separate but not opposed; the coins which come from the two mints are of different metals, but there is a fixed relation between them. The interests of true thought demand that the language currency should be honestly dealt with. The counterfeit coin and the spurious cheque may circulate a long time, but they are bound to be exposed in the end. In the meantime, however, they may have caused the ruin of many who have handled them.

The Pharisees who consulted with the Herodians how they might entrap Christ in His conversation, were adepts in the uttering of base coin and the issuing of spurious cheques on the bank of thought. Their action was a conspiracy, their instruments consisted of counterfeit coins and spurious cheques. They wished to use Him as their dupe, upon whom they might palm off their counterfeits, and then either expose Him to the public, or denounce Him to the authorities. With the cunning of dealers in deceit, they sought by flattery to bait the hook by which they hoped to catch their victim. "Teacher," they said, "we know that you are a truthful man, and that you teach God's way in truth. You care for no man's person, and are indifferent to what men think. Tell us, therefore, what is your real opinion. Is it lawful to pay tribute to Cæsar or not?" There was something sinister in the conjunction of two such opposed parties as the Pharisees and the Herodians. The coins which such a union issued would need very careful examination. There is hardly a single word which rings true. They give Him the title of Teacher, hoping to represent Him as an agitator; they suggest that He speaks the truth, that they may be able to charge Him with treason; they talk religion, that they may induce Him to speak on politics; they praise Him for His impartiality, with the intention of convicting Him of disloyalty; they solicit a confidence, with the

express purpose of betraying it. A common religious hatred has swamped for the time being their mutual political enmity. They have each united to ask a question for the very purpose of betraying to the other side the very man who, by His answer, shows that He agrees with them. If His answer shows that He is at one with the Pharisee, the Pharisee will joyfully hand Him over to the Herodian. If it shows Him in agreement with the Herodian, the Herodian will as gladly betray Him to the Pharisee. The chief priests and elders who had been so discomfited by Christ's question as to the baptism of John, had been struck with the skill by which He had impaled them on the horns of a dilemma. Could they not turn the tables upon Him, and by the use of a cunningly contrived question, place Him in a similar position? They constructed their question accordingly, and sent their disciples along with the Herodians, while they waited with eagerness to see upon which of the horns of their dilemma He would impale Himself.

There is the withering scorn of an honest heart, and the righteous contempt of a clear intellect, for the knavery on the one hand, and the obtuseness on the other. "Hypocrites! Why are you trying to trap Me? Your disguise is too transparent; the net is openly spread in the sight of the bird. Pharisee! and condescending to argue on such a question as paying tribute to Cæsar! Follower of

the party of Herod ! that puppet of Rome ! and questioning the legality of paying taxes ! ” The fraud is too evident, the masks, instead of concealing, reveal the features. The carefully constructed dilemma is too manifest, the horns are too prominent and naked. “ Show Me the current coin. Lawful ? Tribute ? Cæsar ? There is not a single coin which you have brought which is genuine. What is your idea of lawful ? What do you mean by tribute ? Who is the Cæsar to whom it is to be paid ? ” He knows them too well to allow them to substitute other counterfeits for those which He has detected. “ Show Me the money that passes current, which does not depend upon your imprimatur. Let Me see the thought with which you deal day by day, not the words you use in the tricks of your trade. ” The answer is no clever and ingenious evasion. He might fairly and honourably decline to answer a question which they had no right to ask, and which He had no need to answer. He will not, however, even appear to shuffle a difficulty, far less follow their example in the matter of John’s baptism; and retreat under cover of a cowardly lie. There is an answer which it behoves these men to know, a lesson they need to be taught. His eye, however, is too keen to pass a spurious cheque, His ear is too acute to fail to detect the false ring of a counterfeit coin. With the unrivalled skill of a perfect master in the art of teaching, He first elicits from the pupil the

meaning of his question. What was their conception of the words they used? Lawful? What did *they* mean by it? How did they use it in their daily life? They sought to pose as conscientious objectors. Where was this tender conscience of theirs in the daily duties? Was it asleep when the advantages of the Roman Government manifested itself in the privileges and comforts of their business and social life, and only awake when the tax-collector demanded his dues? What was the current coin of which they availed themselves in the ordinary affairs of life? This would define their real conception of the lawful and the unlawful. Let them produce the current coin of the bank upon which they issued their cheque, and then its true value could be ascertained.

Abashed by the quickness with which He had detected the object of their temporary union, and the purpose of their question, but still confident in the skilfulness with which their question had been constructed, they produced the denarius of the Roman Empire. "Whose likeness and superscription is this?" He asks them. It was a coin, not a mere piece of metal. It was stamped and inscribed with an authority which guaranteed its value. Their cheque had come back from the bank, and the current coin of the Roman Empire was in His hand. It was the coin they used in their daily life, its authority was that upon which they relied in all their transactions. They recog-

nised its value, and demanded a just equivalent in exchange for it. It was legal tender, and they used it as such. It was legal, however, because of the likeness and superscription which was stamped upon it. They not only availed themselves of the privilege it conferred upon them as a medium of exchange, they equally took advantage of the political rights and privileges which their relation to the Emperor, whose image it bore, brought to them. They were not conscientious objectors who refused to take Government aid, but political defaulters who refused to pay for the aid they had already taken. They relied upon Cæsar's authority for the value of the money they used ; they questioned his authority to demand from them in return a moiety for the upkeep of that authority. Christ's question draws out from their reluctant lips the answer which convicts them of inconsistency and insincerity. They are compelled to reply, "Cæsar's." Their word—lawful—has come back with the impress of Cæsar upon it. Tribute has been returned with the superscription of contribution written upon it. Cæsar means, as they will in a few days openly boast, that they have no king but Cæsar. The question they have asked is thus taken out of the region of politics and brought into the domain of ethics. Is it lawful to take something for nothing? Is it allowable to accept Government aid and refuse to pay taxes? The answer is incontrovertible. "Render unto

Cæsar what is Cæsar's. Having taken the privileges, assume the responsibilities. Having defined your conception of what is lawful, keep to it. If it is lawful to take Cæsar's doles, it is lawful, and indeed imperative, to pay Cæsar's dues." The man whose current coin for right is expediency, has no right to draw cheques on the bank of conscience. They will inevitably be returned with the fatal endorsement,—No effects. The man whose conscience does not forbid him taking a Government grant, cannot honestly put forward a conscientious objection to paying Government taxes.

They have secured a categorical answer to their question, but not such as they anticipated. They have got one of the two answers they expected, but in such a way that they can make no use of it. Instead of convicting Him of insurrection, they have convicted themselves of inconsistency. They have covered themselves with the very confusion with which they had hoped to cover Him. They can neither justify themselves nor can they entangle Him. Later on they will unblushingly perjure themselves by boldly declaring that He taught that it was *not* lawful to pay tribute, but at present they are too dumbfounded at His reply to say a word. He does not, however, leave them with the answer to the question they have asked. He answers the question which they had no intention of asking. "Render unto Cæsar what is Cæsar's, *and to God*

what is God's." To these pseudo-conscientious objectors He has a word to say about that conscience for which they profess so much reverence. There is another kind of tribute-money which bears a very different image and superscription. He too will ask them a question, not with any intention of entrapping them in their speech, but in honesty and sincerity of heart. "Is it right to pay tribute to hate and malice?" He can produce the tribute-money of the true King, the current coin of His own daily life. The conception of right is that which bears the image and superscription of the King of Kings. How does the bitter hate and malice of their own hearts stand in relation to the law of loving their neighbour as themselves? How does their refusal to accept the truth, stand in relation to the law of loving God with all their heart and soul and mind and strength? How does their whole life, with all the blessing they receive from on high, stand in relation to their refusal to render back that which belongs to God? They are quibbling about the legality of paying taxes to Cæsar whose money they use, and on whose authority and power their national existence depends. What of the tribute that is due to God for their religious and spiritual privileges? If it is lawful to give to Cæsar what is Cæsar's, is it right to withhold from God what is God's? Will they strain out the gnat and swallow the camel? The appeal is to their own

consciences, and it is unanswerable. They heard and were amazed ; they listened and were dumb. The conspiracy has failed, the base coin of their thought is returned to their hands. Instead of separating with mutual congratulations, the union is dissolved in silence, and Pharisee and Herodian go each their own way, amazed at the consummate ease with which the Galilean Peasant has extricated Himself from the net they had so cunningly woven to entrap Him. His appeal to their conscience has been in vain, for it is seared as with a hot iron. In a few days they will accomplish by wilful perjury what they have failed to do by the cunning of deceit, and will confidently affirm that He declared it was unlawful to give tribute to Cæsar. "They left Him and went their way." Shame and confusion drove them away, hatred and malice directed their steps. They would confront Him once more with a lie on their lips and murder in their hearts, and joyfully acknowledge Cæsar's authority if only Pilate will deliver Jesus into their hands. They will hesitate to go into the judgment hall lest they should be defiled, but they will eagerly cry, "His blood be upon us and our children."

XXI

POSITIVISTS

Matt xxii. 23-33 ; Mark xii. 18-27 ; Luke xx. 27-40.

MEN form opinions, but opinions also form men. The one is the reflex action of the other. While it is unfair to judge any man by his opinions, the influence of his opinions, which is seen in his character, will always either justify or condemn the man. Opinion merely indicates the type of mind, the power of correct or incorrect reasoning which the man possesses. The reflex action of his opinions shows his character, the kind of man he actually is. Opinion belongs to the mental, character to the moral plane. Opinion is subject to criticism, character comes up for judgment. On the mental plane freedom to speculate is liberty to think for oneself ; on the moral plane freedom to experiment is license to live for oneself. The reason of humanity protects itself on the mental plane by means of its logic. The conscience of humanity vindicates itself on the moral plane by means of its categorical imperatives. Errors in

opinion are suits which must be filed in the civil court of the Reason ; errors in character are criminal cases which must be brought before the bar of Conscience. In the one court the claims are adjudicated ; in the other the man is acquitted or condemned.

Opinions, however, are not merely passive, they are active as well. It is in this latter capacity that they are often aiders and abettors, accomplices or accessories before the act, and as such are liable to prosecution in the criminal court of Conscience. There is a relation between opinion and conduct in some cases, of which the conscience of humanity cannot be oblivious. It regards the world as subject to a moral government, as designed for moral ends, and therefore it judges of things by their effects. It holds that the true is the beautiful in the sphere of mind, and that the beautiful is the true in the sphere of morals. It concludes therefore that what is true on the mental plane must be beautiful on the moral plane, and *vice versa*. In cases in which the result is pronounced this is fully recognised. The Indian Government, whose tolerance is unquestioned, condemned the religious opinion of the Hindus with regard to Suttee, because of this connection between opinion and conduct. The conduct outraged the moral sense, and therefore no argument based on liberty of religious belief was admissible. When esoteric belief translates itself into exoteric ritual, it emerges

from the mental to the moral plane, and becomes amenable to the moral tribunal. In cases, however, which are not so pronounced the same feeling is present, though it manifests itself in a different way. Beliefs must always be more or less judged by their tendencies and influences. Humanity is more practical than theoretical. The rule of thumb is more often used than the mathematical formula ; the distance is more often stepped than measured. Men are more inclined to accept an opinion as true, which produces a character which is beautiful, than the reverse. Just as that which makes for life in the physical realm is stamped with Nature's approval, so that which makes for a richer life is stamped with Humanity's approval. Where a mathematical demonstration is impossible, a moral conviction has an imperative value. What the Pure Reason may be forced to reject, the Practical Reason is forced to accept. There are some truths which are arrived at by a process of deduction, there are others which the mind seizes and clings to by intuition. Just as instinct in the animal is the forerunner of reason in the man, so intuition may be the forerunner of a higher reason yet to be evolved. The belief in immortality is not the result of a deductive process of the reason, it is an intuition of the soul which abundantly justifies itself by the results it produces in character and life. It is not a desire for mere existence ; it is a striving for a richer and fuller life. Evolution has

shown us that Nature does not deceive her children, but that she always has a satisfaction for the desire she creates. The striving is the earnest of the attainment ; the anticipation is the prophecy of a fulfilment. If she teaches us anything, she teaches that life is an ascent to a higher and ever higher manifestation. She always has a goal to be attained, and she inspires her children by planting within them the aspiration for something yet beyond. She is herself responsible for the belief in immortality, and unless she is false to all our knowledge of her working, she must fulfil the desire she has implanted.

The Sadducees who came to Christ with their question about the Resurrection, were materialists whose creed had coarsened and not refined them. The Sadducee was the Positivist of the pre-Christian era, who rigidly excluded from his belief everything outside the range of sense perception. As a party they were intensely religious and moral. If the deputation who waited upon Christ, however, is fairly representative of the class, we are forced to conclude that their view of life was a distinctly low one. Their lack of faith in immortality had degraded their conception of human life to that of mere animal existence. They were keenly alive to animal instincts, but dead to those higher instincts of the soul which differentiate man from the animal. In contemplating a future life, therefore, they conceived

of it merely as a continuation of the physical, not as a richer and fuller life of the spiritual. In place of the sublime they saw only the ridiculous, and they accordingly sought to confute the belief by reducing it to an absurdity. "Teacher," they said, "Moses enjoined that if a man should die childless, his brother should marry his widow, and raise up a family for him. Now we had among us seven brothers. The eldest married, but died childless, leaving his wife to his brother. So also did the second and the third, down to the seventh. After surviving them all, the woman also died. At the resurrection, therefore, to which of the seven will she belong, for they all married her?" Their reference to the Law is not merely to give legality to the supposed action of the brothers, it is intended to emphasise what in their opinion was the only immortality the Law taught, namely, the immortality of the family. The law was instituted to secure that the family should not become extinct. Their contention, therefore, is that the belief in individual immortality is not only an absurdity, but is in contradiction to the direct teaching of the Law. The *reductio ad absurdum* is a legitimate form of argument, but the user must be careful that the absurdity is in the conclusion deduced, and not in the premisses assumed. The sublime may appear to be the ridiculous, but it may be entirely due to the transfiguring medium. The mind which perceives, may be like a concave

or convex mirror, which distorts the object presented to it. These men had not faithfully reflected the belief in immortality, they had distorted it; the belief did not produce the difficulty, they invented it. They were not anxious to understand another's position, they were simply desirous of ridiculing it.

There is a dignity in Christ's answer, and a refinement in His manner of dealing with the question, which are in marked contrast with the coarseness of His interviewers. He recognises that their plane of thought is different from His own, that their conception of life needs elevating and ennobling. Their coarseness is due to ignorance both of the Scriptures they profess to read, and of the power of the God they profess to worship. They do not realise that the particular law which they quote was instituted to ensure the preservation of the nation for its mission in the world. Their view is bounded by the present: they cannot see the difference between the temporary and the eternal, the physical and the spiritual. They have no conception of any higher life than that of sensual gratification and self-propagation. They need to be reminded that there is a higher and richer life, like that of the angels in Heaven, who live to serve, and who in service find a perpetual joy. The future life is not a prolongation of the physical, it is an intensification of the spiritual. It is lived not on the plane of the material, but on

that of the spiritual. The conditions of the one are inapplicable to the other. "You are in error," He answers, "through ignorance of the Scriptures and of the power of God. For in the Resurrection, men neither marry nor are women given in marriage, but they are like angels in Heaven." The laws which regulate earthly institutions are not to be applied to heavenly conditions. The relation between spirits cannot be judged by means of the relation between bodies, any more than the relations between atoms can be applied to explain the relations between individuals. The gross and materialistic conception which is responsible for the difficulty they invent, is not applicable to the spiritual conception involved in the resurrection. If they wish to understand this latter, they must rid their minds of the former. The formulas of physical science cannot be applied to psychical phenomena. The man who does so will err through not knowing what science really is. These men were trying to apply the law of succession designed for a life subject to death, to the life which was not subject to death but was immortal. The absurdity lay not in the conclusion they deduced from the belief in immortality, but in the premisses they constructed.

Christ is not content, however, with merely exposing their ignorance, He seeks to convince them of the truth of the belief they have assailed. His argument is neither philosophical on the one hand,

nor is it a mere verbal quibble on the other. It is an appeal to the intuitions of the race. He relates the belief in immortality to our knowledge of the character of God, and thereby attests the truth of the intuition upon which the belief is based. Humanity has persistently refused to regard its great men as extinct. It has deified and worshipped them, but it has never really treated them as though they had ceased to be. To apply a scientific phrase, it has believed in the persistence of force, and having recognised a force in the lives of its great men, as that was manifested in their earthly lives, it has instinctively felt that the force, though no longer visible, was active and energising elsewhere. The Sadducees might deny the truth of the Resurrection, but they shared in the instincts of the nation, and the nation regarded Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as living and not dead. "But that the dead rise to life again, even Moses clearly implies in the passage about the Bush, where he calls the Lord, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. God is not a God of the dead, but of the living." The instincts of humanity are true intuitions. The relation which subsists between God and man, and which is so pronounced in the case of the spiritually great men of the past, is a guarantee of their immortality. If the relation is real it must be permanent. It is the consciousness of man's kinship to God which distinguishes him from the mere animal. He

enters into communion and fellowship with God ; he is admitted into intimate relation with the Father. The character of God forbids the conception that having once admitted man to the intimacy of friendship, He would allow the relationship to be dissolved. God cannot be bereft of His children ; His heart cannot be impoverished by loss. It is not merely to the constitution of man's nature, therefore, that Christ points as a proof of his immortality, it is upon the nature of God that He bases the assurance. It is not therefore so much a question as to whether man's constitution can survive the shock of death, as it is whether it is consistent with the nature of God for Him to sustain the loss. The Sadducees erred because they did not recognise the power of God. They did not realise that human love experiences the bitterness of bereavement, because it has not the power to recall the lost one. We refuse to believe that those whom we have loved and lost are extinct, or that the relationship we sustained with them has exhausted itself. If we had but the power it should never cease ; if their response depended upon us, it would be eternal. Divine love has the power ; the relationship is not that of the hold of man upon God, but the hold of God upon man. Love never faileth, and therefore the life of love never ceaseth. God was the God of Abraham, but Abraham was the friend of God. The relationship was real, and therefore it was eternal. " God is not a

God of the dead, but of the living, for to Him all are alive." The argument is unique, but it is characteristic of Christ. It is based upon His own consciousness of the relation between Himself and the Father, which He knew was indissoluble. He defines eternal life as the consciousness of the relation of the soul to God. "Eternal life consists in this,—in knowing the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom God has sent." Christ takes therefore the intuitions of the race, and interprets them in the light of His own personal consciousness of the relation between Himself and God. Intuitions of men are the prophecy, of which His own consciousness is the fulfilment.

The modern theory of evolution, rightly interpreted, adds emphasis to these remarkable words of Christ. It shows man to be the crown and head of the great process of Nature. Consciousness is his great attainment; religion is his great achievement. He alone of all creation has worked his way up to a conscious relation with God. That relation once established, his truer and fuller life is no longer a correspondence between his physical frame and its material environment; it is a correspondence between his soul and God. Immortality therefore is simply the development and perfection of the relation which has been established. The environment of the soul is not an ever-changing Matter, subject to variable forces, but the Unchanging and Eternal God. While the

old environment of his physical frame necessitated sooner or later its dissolution, the new environment, God, guarantees his immortality. The cause of his physical death is not, strictly speaking, in himself, but in his environment ; his dissolution is the result of the operation of external forces. The guarantee of his continuance must be sought in a new environment,—in God, in whom “ we live, and move, and have our being.” God is not God to dead and unconscious matter ; He is God to conscious and living minds alone, and all such minds are for ever alive to Him.

XXII

A MORAL SCEPTIC

Matt. xxvii. 11-26 ; Mark xv. 1-15 ; Luke xxiii. 1-24 ;
John xviii. 28-xix. 16.

THE examinations in the school of life are never notified in advance. We are generally taken by surprise, and the announcement of our success or failure is, as a rule, the first intimation we receive that the examination has taken place. They are tests which are applied, not to our theories of life, but to our practical living ; they demonstrate, not the amount of knowledge we have gained, but the quality of the character we have formed. We are summoned to no specified place, but the examination takes place in any one of our accustomed haunts of business or of pleasure. It is limited to no one department of life, but may take place in any ; it is confined to no particular branch of study or kind of occupation, it may embrace them all, or select a few, or even one. The examiners may be found amongst our friends or acquaintances, or even amongst our enemies, but the result is never

open to question. Success is often as much of a surprise as failure. Everything depends upon our preparedness, not for a formal examination, but for a certain effort we are called upon to make. Though the examination is sprung suddenly upon us, it is never unfair, for it is always concerned with the lessons which experience ought to have taught us. Character is a perfect memory, and nothing that has ever been really learned is lost. Examinations are practically always taking place, but it is only occasionally that something in the event itself distinguishes it as a special test, and success or failure is written legibly against our names. If we could only recognise that particular something in the common event which is destined to make it one of the test examinations of our life, how careful we should be in the part we played, but, alas ! for reputation so gained, it is hid from our eyes.

Not an ear in court or market for the low foreboding cry
Of those Crises, God's stern winnowers, from whose feet
 earth's chaff must fly ;
Never shows the choice momentous till the judgment has
 passed by.

The Present is not and cannot stand alone ; it is indissolubly connected with the Past and the Future. History alone has the true perspective by which to judge what is relatively great or little, what is of vital moment and what is of no consequence. That which we have regarded as trifling, history

may dignify as of supreme importance ; that which we have thought great, may turn out to be infinitesimal. Our only safety lies in giving heed to that which is permanent and unchanging,—the moral quality of our deeds ; in listening to the still small voice of our own conscience,—that echo of the voice of God within the soul. Truth is not temporary but eternal ; right is not the expedient but the just.

Whether the crisis produces the great man, or the great man makes the crisis, will always be a matter of dispute. Probably there is as much to be said for the one contention as for the other. However that may be, there is no more pitiable spectacle than the conjunction of a time momentous with great events, and a man or nation utterly unequal to the demands which their time and place make upon them. Perhaps of all the cases which history records of this disparity, that of Pilate stands out the most prominent. The supreme event in the history of humanity is designated as happening “under Pontius Pilate.” How little did he foresee when he rejoiced in his appointment as Governor of Judæa, that the event which was to happen during his rule, would cover his name with everlasting reproach. If ever a man was unprepared for a great destiny it was Pilate. One cannot but feel infinite pity for the man, so utterly and hopelessly incapable, who was thus suddenly tried by an event destined to prove of world-wide

significance. His failure, however, is no more and no less than that of thousands like him. It has wider publication because his victim was unique, but as far as Pilate is concerned, his failure has no more moral significance than the thousand similar failures which are taking place every day. He stands condemned, not for having sacrificed the Christ, but for having in the interests of a false expediency sacrificed his conscience. His failure was not in being unable to release Jesus, but in being unwilling to give effect to his own judgment of acquittal. His weakness is not in any intellectual scepticism as to the truth, but in being unwilling through cowardice to listen to the voice of the truth he recognised.

All the accounts given us of Pilate's character and official administration are in the closest agreement with the picture of the man so graphically depicted in the Synoptics, and especially in the Johannine Gospel. That utter contempt for the Jew, expressed in his reply, "Am I a Jew?" is manifested at the very beginning of his career, when he allowed his soldiers to bring into the Holy City the silver eagles and other insignia of the legions. Having thereby aroused the fanatical passions of the people, he displays that same weakness of character which is evident in the Gospel interviews, by yielding to the tumult he had himself aroused, and sending the images back again

to Cæsarea. The same disregard for religious ideas of all kinds which meets us in the Gospel story, is manifested in the account which is given us of his application of the Temple money in the construction of an aqueduct from the Pools of Solomon.

Perhaps the nearest parallel that can be found to the position in which Pilate found himself, is that of a District Magistrate in India, who, having given up all religious belief himself, is profoundly contemptuous of the superstitions he finds in India, and particularly irritated by the constant unrest due to the fanatical spirit of Hindu and Mohammedan. Such men soon find themselves thwarted and hindered, misunderstood and misjudged, because from their very character and type of mind they cannot understand or sympathise with the people over whom they have to rule. They speedily settle down into a purely selfish life, and their views become both pessimistic and cynical. They are hopeless of doing any good, even if they have any strong wish in the matter. In their earlier career they may perhaps have brought upon themselves a reprimand for some well-intentioned but ill-considered scheme or intervention, and their chief desire now is to confine themselves to the ordinary routine of their office, finish the time of exile from their native land at the earliest opportunity, and retire on their pension. Imagine such a type of man finding himself suddenly involved

in some religious controversy with a semi-political element thrown in, and a serious riot or insurrection threatened, and you have the case of Pilate in modern dress. Such a man has no strong moral or religious feeling to guide him; he may be quite conscious that there is something kept in the background, that the motives of the Brahmins are purely obstructive and mischievous, and that the case they have brought before him is concerned with nothing more serious than the efforts of a religious reformer who has in some way offended or outraged their priestly pretensions, and yet he is confronted with the prospect of a political disturbance likely to compromise his career. He is quite convinced that the alleged political offence is a factitious one, yet it is of such a kind that he is bound to take notice of it, and treat it seriously. He perceives that at the bottom it is a question of religious differences with which he has no concern, and for which he feels a genuine contempt. At the same time experience has shown him how easily the religious may run into the political, and he is perfectly aware that the Supreme Government is particularly anxious to prevent all religious disturbance, and avoid any occasion for insurrection. His sense of fair play, which is characteristic of his nation, is enlisted on behalf of the victim, and he is determined that he will not allow himself to be made the catspaw of Brahminical intrigue and priestly vindictiveness, yet as the case proceeds he

finds himself being more and more drawn into the toils which their astuteness and social influence enable them to weave around him. He struggles, but with ever-decreasing strength. After all, his career is worth more to him than anything else, and he is perfectly convinced that if these wily Brahmins do not get their way in one form, they are sure to get it in another. The prisoner is probably innocent of any political crime, but he must have been a fool to arouse the opposition of the priests and leaders amongst his own people, and can hardly expect to escape in any case. All attempts to effect his release have failed, his own temper is getting ruffled, and ominous murmurs amongst the excited and fanatical crowd show him that a spark is all that is necessary to produce an explosion. One thing seems certain, and that is, that they will never go away without their victim. It is equally certain that unless they depart, and that quickly, there will be a serious riot which will compromise him with the Government. Well, he has done his best to save the man, and he will wash his hands of all responsibility, and throw the burden on them, after which they may do what they like. Better to err on the side of suppressing an alleged political conspiracy than to lay himself open to the charge, which these wily priests are sure to bring against him, that he has acquitted a dangerous conspirator. With the exception of the power to order instant execution, the case might

happen any day in India, even in this twentieth century, and facsimiles of the character of Pilate might not be found so very rare. With such a parallel in our minds we shall be better able to appreciate the remarkable interview between Christ and Pilate.

• Aroused in the very early hours of the morning by the crowd of priests and rulers who brought Jesus from the palace of the high priest to the palace of Herod, in which Pilate was lodged during his temporary residence in the capital, the Governor was in no very good-humour as he came outside to inquire into the case they had brought before him. His ill-humour would be further increased by the religious scruples of the priests to enter the palace for fear of defilement. His official chair is brought out and placed on the raised terrace in front of the judgment hall. Taking his seat, Pilate asks for the charge against the prisoner to be stated. The priests evidently did not anticipate, nor did they relish, the judicial inquiry Pilate is preparing to make. They had come because they were compelled, and they merely wanted the arm of Rome to execute the sentence of death which the Jewish tribunal had already passed. Pilate's ill-humour calls forth a similar ill-humour in them, and they haughtily answer that if the man were not a criminal, they would not have brought him. Pilate is fond of sarcasm, and the opportunity is too good to be

lost. "Very well," he answers, "take him and judge him according to your own law." If they have already decided the case, why bring it to him? They are compelled to confess that they have no power to inflict the death-penalty, and that as this is a capital offence, they have brought the prisoner to Pilate. The charge therefore is formulated as one of political agitation, inciting to refuse to pay tribute to the Emperor, and claiming to be himself an anointed king. Pilate thereupon turns his back upon the priests and rulers, and taking advantage of their unwillingness to enter the judgment hall, proceeds there that he may conduct his inquiry in private.

He has had a good look at the prisoner while the charge has been formulated, and he is impressed with his insignificance and harmlessness. This is no fierce zealot or political agitator. If it is true that he claims to be a king, it is more likely that he is some harmless lunatic, or some descendant of a former line of kings, a rival rather of Herod than of Cæsar. Anyhow, now that they are alone, he will see what the man has to say for himself. "You," he says, turning to the prisoner who has been brought in, and of whose name he is as yet ignorant, "are *you* the King of the Jews?" The question is more like a thought that has clipped out, than a direct interrogation. As Pilate looks at the man before him, the groundlessness of the charge is self-evident to him. This man king of

the Jews? The thing is preposterous. The figure before him neither accords with his conception of a king, nor with his knowledge of the turbulent people of whom he is said to be the king.

Christ hears the question, not as that of a judge interrogating a prisoner, but as that of an inquirer asking a teacher. With the teacher's quick insight, He recognises the character of the man before him, "a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways." There are two Pilates, the better and the worse. The one is Pilate the man, the other Pilate the Governor. As the man, Pilate has no sympathy with the priests and rulers; as the Governor, he is more or less afraid of them. As the man, he feels a kind of sympathy with their victim; as the Governor, he resents the disturbance of which the prisoner before him is the occasion. In the man, right and justice may perchance secure a hearing in the court of conscience; in the Governor, expediency and self-interest are the only ministers he ever listens to. It is the recognition of this twofold character of Pilate which explains the whole of this remarkable interview. With the Governor, Christ has nothing to do and nothing to say; with the man and the moral struggle through which he is passing, He feels the deepest interest, renders what help is possible, and even pities the man whose failure in this crisis of his life resulted in His own death-

warrant. While Christ's attitude throughout is more that of the teacher than that of the prisoner at the bar, it must be observed that His line of defence was the only one which had a chance of success. There was a conflict in the breast of Pilate between the better and the worse nature. The worse won, and Christ was condemned ; but whatever chance of, an acquittal there may have been, lay in an appeal from Pilate the Governor, to Pilate the man. Christ recognised this at the beginning, and therefore His answer to Pilate's first question is a counter-inquiry as to which Pilate is speaking. "Do you ask this," He says, "on your own initiative, or are you simply the mouthpiece of others?" All depends upon which of the two Pilates is going to be master. Is he going to be himself, or, as the priests and rulers expect, their tool? He has left them outside and entered into his own judgment hall where they cannot come. So far good, but is it the same Pilate who is to examine inside the hall, as the one who merely listens to the calumnies of the Jews, and bends beneath the tumult without? Is it right and justice who sit at his side as assessors, or fear and expediency? Pilate knows, as his question shows, that this man is no political conspirator. If, as the man, he asserts himself, he will say distinctly that he acquits the prisoner of the only charge which it is his business to take notice of. If, however, as the Governor, he allows

the outside influence to enter into what should be his own inviolable judgment hall and coerce him, he is lost. The counter-question, therefore, is an appeal to the two assessors, right and justice, who sit at Pilate's side, and a challenge to the two other assessors, fear and expediency, who sit at the Governor's side, and who have intruded into a court which their presence defiles. Is it Pilate himself who speaks, or are the words those of the false assessors, who ought to be summarily ordered out of court?

The appeal has reached the man, but it has stirred the Roman in him. He sees the reference to outside influence, but why should this Jew complain of his own people and rulers? His former pity for an individual is overwhelmed by contempt for a nation whom he despises. "Am I a Jew?" he asks in deepest scorn; "it is your own nation and the chief priests who have handed you over to me; what have you done?". Does the man think that he has any interest in the petty disputes and empty rivalries of *Jews*? Let them wrangle and quarrel as much as they please for all he cares, as long as they abstain from interfering with him or his administration. As for this man, whom they are anxious to put to death, what has he done to arouse their enmity? It is at least suspicious that Jews and chief priests should hand over to the Roman power one whom they allege to be a political conspirator. He has not found

them so loyal as a rule, that their conduct in this instance can pass unchallenged. If the prisoner is appealing to Roman against Jew, well let him say what he has done to offend the Jew. If it is as a partisan of Rome, he shall be safe from these howling priests, riot and insurrection notwithstanding.

Christ sees that Pilate has misunderstood His question, and that he is regarding the case as a political one, though one which may possibly turn out in favour of the prisoner and against His accusers. He returns therefore to the question which Pilate had first asked Him, and answers, "My kingdom does not belong to this world. If My kingdom did belong to this world, My subjects would have resolutely fought on My behalf in order that I might not fall into the hands of the Jews. But, as a matter of fact, My kingdom is neither local nor temporary." The question which Pilate had asked, did not admit of a categorical answer. He was a king in the truest sense ; He was not a king as the priests meant it, and as Pilate might understand it. He was no rival of a Cæsar, His kingdom had no territorial boundaries, His legions were no fighting army. It was true that the Jews had handed Him over to the Roman, but if He had been the political king they made out, His subjects would have prevented His falling into their hands. Pilate therefore could see for himself that, King though He was, His kingdom was not political.

Pilate begins to understand what is at the back of the action of the chief priests in bringing the charge against Him, and his first impression is deepened. He knows perfectly well that if the prisoner had claimed to be king in the political sense, the Jews would never have delivered him over to the Roman power. He also recognises that there is weight in what Christ says, that if His kingdom were political, His subjects and partisans would at least have struck a blow in His defence. The prisoner, therefore, if he has claimed to be a king, must have done so with a special meaning attached to the title, which the chief priests have purposely omitted to mention. His question is accordingly directed to find this out. "You *are* a king, then?" he asks, seeking to elicit the information he wants.

Christ recognises that it is the man and not the Governor who is asking the question, and feels that He can speak freely. "As you say," He replies, "I am a king. I was born to the position, and I have come into the world to occupy it. This, in fact, is the meaning of My presence in the world, namely, that I might be a living witness of the Truth. Every one who is a partisan of the Truth listens to My voice." Pilate has invited His confidence, and it is freely given. There is an empire of Truth, of which Pilate is not ignorant, and He who is a living witness to the Truth is a king among men. His throne may be a cross, His crown

that of the martyr, but every one who is loyal to the Truth, instinctively recognises the King, and listens to His voice. The answer is an appeal to the true man in Pilate ; a solemn warning against listening to the clamours of the crowd, and the false testimony so easily procurable: Does Pilate care more for right than for expediency ; does he belong to the elect party of Truth, as distinct from the party of lies and intrigue which is waiting for blood outside ? The decision is momentous for Pilate, for his failure in this crisis of his life will cover his name with infamy for all time.

Alas for Pilate, the examination has found out his weakness. On a question of law he is at home ; on one of equity he is at sea without chart or compass. "Truth !" he exclaims ; "What is truth ?" A sentiment, an opinion, a question to be discussed in the schools, but out of place in the practical affairs of life. This man who calls himself a king, and his teaching a kingdom, is clearly a mere dreamer, and the case has no political significance. There is no need to go into it further, for he has obtained all the information he needs. The appeal to the deeper instincts of Pilate's nature has failed, for the chords which should have vibrated have long since been broken. He has no convictions which can be aroused, no finer sentiment which can be called forth. For Roman justice, however, he has some regard—an inborn respect for its proper administration, but for right and truth, as eternal

verities, he has no reverence ; his soul gives forth no response to their invitation. He understands them merely as abstract opinions which the philosophers delight to talk about, but that a man should die for them, never enters his mind. A kingdom of Truth ! Is that all ? Why waste time over such a question ? The whole thing is a mere dispute about words, in which the priests have evidently had the worst of the argument, and are trying to revenge themselves for their defeat. Well, he is not going to be made a tool of, and out he strides to tell them so.

“ I find the man innocent.” Thus he announces the result of his examination to the impatient chief priests and rulers who have been waiting outside. He is met with a storm of remonstrance and angry protest. Amidst the babel of voices, he catches the words, “ sedition,” “ Judæa,” “ Galilee,” and gathers that they are protesting that the prisoner is a dangerous sedition-monger, spreading his obnoxious doctrines through the length and breadth of the land. The mention of Galilee opens out an easy method of getting rid of the whole affair. Herod, the ruler of Galilee, is at present in Jerusalem for the Feast, and if the prisoner is one of his subjects, then the priests can take the case to him, and Pilate will be well rid of it. To Herod, therefore, he sends them with the prisoner under guard, and congratulates himself that he has got rid of an unpleasant business.

Like so many others; however, who have tried to shirk responsibilities, Pilate finds that the expedient is useless, and the case is returned for his own disposal. Once more the crowd of priests with their prisoner confronts him, and the demand for the sentence of death is shouted at him. Pilate again takes his seat, and hopes to dispose of the matter by means of a compromise. "You have brought this man to me," he says, "on a charge of corrupting the loyalty of the people; but you see that I have examined him and found that he has done nothing which deserves so severe a penalty as death. Not only so, but Herod also finds him innocent, and has sent him back to us. You must see, therefore, that this is no case for the death-penalty. I shall therefore scourge him and release him." This decision is met with a shout of fury, "Away with the fellow, and release Barabbas." If it is a question of releasing a political prisoner, they will let him know the man they choose. Barabbas, who has been a long time in jail in connection with a riot which had occurred in the city, and during which blood had been shed, is the man of their choice.

The reference to the release of a prisoner reminds Pilate of a custom connected with the Passover Festival, and he eagerly seizes it as another expedient for getting rid of his responsibility. Motioning with his hand for silence, he again addresses them. "You have referred to a

custom that I should release a prisoner at the Pass-over. Very well, shall I release you the King of the Jews?" His address this time is to the people, whom he hopes to find more reasonable than the priests, and he thinks that they may catch at the idea of the release of a king. The priests, however, see the move, and eagerly suggest the name of Barabbas. As with one voice they cry out, "Not this man, but Barabbas." Seeing the temper of the crowd, and hoping that the sight of the terrible Roman scourging will satisfy their lust for blood, Pilate gives order for the infliction of the punishment to which he has condemned the man whom he has found to be innocent. The scourging is carried out, and once more the prisoner is brought forth wearing the mock crown of thorns and the purple garment. Even Pilate is struck with the pitiable sight which the prisoner presents, and hoping to arouse some pity in the breast of the crowd, exclaims, "Behold the man!" The crowd, however, fearing that they are going to be balked of their prey, and that Pilate is about to complete the sentence by releasing him, urged on by the priests, once more take up the cry, "Away with him! To the cross! To the cross! Away with this fellow, and release Barabbas." Pilate persists in trying to argue with the maddened crowd. "Why," he asks, "what evil has he done?" A deafening roar, "To the cross! To the cross!" is the only response. "Take him yourselves, and crucify

him," he answers back, "for I have found him innocent." The priests see that he is yielding, and cry out,—“We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die, because he claimed to be the Son of God.” If Pilate thinks him innocent, they know he is guilty; if he has not broken the Roman law, he has broken the Mosaic Law, and nothing but his blood can atone for that.

Like many who have no religious convictions, Pilate is superstitious to a degree, and the words, “son of God,” startle him with a nervous fear. Who is this strange man, calm and silent in the midst of all the tumult of his foes? Hurriedly he summons the guard to conduct the prisoner once more into the judgment hall that he may question him again in private. “What is your origin?” he asks in earnestness not unmingled with awe. This time there is no answer. Pilate is no longer a free man, he has given way to the priests and rulers outside. He has deliberately disobeyed his own conscience, has set aside his own judgment of acquittal at the bidding of the prosecution. The judge has thrown in his lot with the prosecutors, and has thereby forfeited all right to a reply. He has turned his back upon the two assessors, right and justice, who have recorded their verdict of not guilty, and is listening to his two ministers, fear and expediency, who are whispering their counsels in his ear. As long as these false counsellors are allowed a place at his side, his court of justice is a

mockery, and the prisoner will remain silent. Pilate mistakes his silence, and attributes it to either fear or sullenness. "Will you not speak even to me," he asks; "do you not know that I have power to release you and power to crucify you?" He can understand the prisoner's silence in the presence of his enemies; but here in the quiet of the judgment hall it is out of place. Does the man not know that a word here may effect his release, or a stubborn silence may lead him to the cross? Pilate fails to see that as long as fear and expediency sit in the private judgment hall of conscience, whispering their doubts and suggesting their expedients, the still small voice must of necessity remain unheard.

"Power!" answers Christ; "you would have none over Me except it had been conferred from above. Consequently he who delivered Me up to you has the greater guilt." There is the pity of a great soul at the boast of one dressed in brief authority, who imagines he is anything more than a tool in the hand. Does Pilate imagine for a moment that he is the pivot upon which the whole tragedy is turning? Power to release? He had once, and might have earned eternal fame, but it has gone from his nerveless grasp. Power to crucify? Nay, he is the slave of the chief priests already, and all that he will be allowed to do is to act as executioner of the sentence they have pronounced. Christ foresees the issue, and knows

that the matter has already passed out of Pilate's hands. He will undoubtedly yield to the outside pressure, he will stifle the voice of his own conscience, and give way to the counsels of fear and expediency. His guilt will remain, and the blot of disgrace will abide for ever on his memory, but he is only a tool after all. The authority which he exercises has been entrusted into his hands from above ; it is the use he makes of it for which alone he is responsible. The greater guilt attaches to that one, High Priest of the chosen people of God, who denies the title of the Lord's Anointed to the One whom the Father has sent, and hands over the Messiah of Israel to the power of Rome.

Pilate holds a hurried consultation with his two favourites, fear and expediency. Expediency can suggest nothing new, fear has suddenly grown religious at the mention of a son of God, and thinks the man should, if possible, be released. Going outside, Pilate once again announces his intention of releasing the prisoner. The priests and rulers, however, recognise the hesitation in his manner, and they know the man. Growing bolder as Pilate grows weaker, they play upon his fears. "If you release this man, you are no friend of the Emperor's ; every one who sets himself up as a king declares himself a rebel against the Emperor." This last shaft went home, and fear and expediency both alike urged that the man must be sacrificed, if place and position were to be

retained. The friendship of the Emperor must be preserved even though the life of an innocent man be the cost. Pilate orders the guard to bring forth the prisoner, and once more takes his seat on the Judge's chair. Before pronouncing the sentence which he perceives to be inevitable, he indulges once again in his favourite habit of sarcasm. Pointing to the prisoner he exclaims, "See, here is your king." A roar of voices, crying "Away with him, away with him, crucify him," is the only response he elicits from the maddened crowd. "Am I to crucify your king?" he asks in mock surprise. The priests are more than a match for him, and reply with meaning, "We have no king but the Emperor."

Pilate catches the meaning of their reply, and sees that the situation is becoming serious. It will be so easy for these wily priests to distort and misrepresent the scene. They can take his literal words, carefully leaving out the ironical tones of his voice, and represent him as favouring a usurper. He is well aware of the suspicious nature of the Emperor, and realises that the scene must be cut short, ere worse happens. Calling for a bowl of water, he washes his hands in the sight of the crowd, and declares he is not responsible for the blood of an innocent man, the priests and people must answer for it. "His blood be upon us, and upon our children," they shout in reply, rejoicing that they have got their way at last.

The trial is over and nothing remains but the formal sentencing of the prisoner. The hands which Pilate has just washed in innocency, must be stained with a dye which no washing can efface. He writes not the condemnation of the prisoner, but his own, and what he has written he has written. He has been brought face to face with incarnate truth, and has asked in hollow mockery, "What is truth?" He is convinced that the prisoner is innocent, and yet, to save himself, he condemns him to death. Not for the crucifixion of the Christ of God must he be held responsible, for he knew not what he did. But for being traitor to his own conscience, for sacrificing right and justice to cowardly fear and shifting expediency, for bowing to the brutal passions of the mob, and allowing himself to be made the tool of unscrupulous priests, Pilate must stand condemned for all time. "So Pilate gave judgment, yielding to their demand. The man who was lying in prison charged with riot and murder, and for whom they clamoured, he set free, but Jesus he gave up to be dealt with as they desired."

XXIII

FAITH VERSUS SIGHT

John xx. 24-29.

THAT sense perception is at the basis of all our knowledge is one of those axioms with which we are all familiar, even though we have never read a word of philosophy. In the common language of daily life we are accustomed to assertions of assured knowledge, by a reference to the experience of one or other of our five senses. Two of them, those of sight and touch, are indeed the criteria which we apply to knowledge of all kinds. "It is evident," or, "It is palpable," are the two chief phrases, which, through many variations, are the signs we use for certitude. If we wish to describe the illusory or doubtful, we invariably deny in some form or another that they can be seen or felt. They are imperceptible or intangible, unseen by the eye or unfelt by the hand, and as such viewed with suspicion or rejected with incredulity. Tennyson has expressed a common conviction when he says, "Knowledge is of things we see," and

contrasts it with faith. To many the difference between faith and knowledge is the difference between the unknown and the known, and much of the agnosticism of the present day is largely due to this conception that the senses are not a means, but the only means of obtaining assured knowledge. To certain types of mind, however, the limitations of sense perception are as remarkable as the range of their operations, and the conception of limiting knowledge to the impressions of sense, and the mind's working on those impressions, is one which presents insuperable difficulties. They are quite conscious of the inestimable debt the mind owes to the senses, but they refuse to believe that the mind cannot pass into regions which are for ever beyond the reach of the senses, or that it cannot arrive at truth except as the object is presented to it by means of the senses. They are conscious that there is a region which is essentially metaphysical, in which the mind moves not as it is guided or impelled by the senses, but by the laws of its own being, and that the goal at which it arrives by strict obedience to those laws is knowledge in the highest and best sense, even though inaccessible to sense perception. In some cases the goal arrived at can be tested by the senses, but whether tested or untested, the reality is the same. The discovery of the planet Neptune by the mind before it was brought within the range of telescopic vision, affords an illustration of what is here meant.

It was the operation of the mind, working according to its own laws, which established the existence of Neptune, before the telescope discovered it. The mind, in fact, in this case aided the senses, instead of being aided by them. It is true that the mind was here only working on the data presented to it by the senses, but its working was based upon the assumption that a previous intelligence had been at work in the constitution of the universe, and that the working of that Mind was in harmony with the laws of our own minds. This, in fact, is scientific faith as distinct from scientific knowledge. It has been arrived at by means of sense perception, but it is none the less faith, as distinct from knowledge. Our great advance in knowledge is due to our walking by faith as well as by sight. Experience has shown us that what is, conforms to reason, and we therefore conclude that whatever conforms to reason exists, whether it has come within the range of sense perception or not. If the senses have not yet discovered it, we search for it with the belief that sooner or later we shall find it. The atomic theory prophesies the existence of elements which have never come within the range of sense perception, and recent discoveries have simply filled up the places which were vacant, and revealed what faith had already perceived. Science has shown us that what is, ought to be, and it cannot escape creating the suspicion that what ought to be, actually is, whether we perceive it or not.

The distinction between faith and knowledge, therefore, is imperfectly described as the difference between the unknown and the known ; it is more accurately described as the difference between anticipated and realised knowledge. Knowledge is not only of things we see, but of things we foresee. The mind may anticipate the senses and believe even where the senses cannot see. If this is true even in the sphere of the physical, the presumption is that it is equally true in the spheres which are metaphysical.

Morality and religion cannot be treated in the same way as the physical sciences. They have their own data which are not material but spiritual. If they are realities, however, they must be intelligible ; they must follow similar laws to those which reign in the material realm, or at any rate they must follow law, and not be the result of chance. In the sphere of morals the good must be the reasonable ; actions must be justifiable. In the sphere of religion, beliefs must be reasonable ; the data upon which they are founded must be consistent with the working of the Divine Mind, as that is already known to us in other spheres. In these two spheres we walk by faith and not by sight, but the faith must be justified by experience or by reason. Here, however, the same results, as we find in the physical meet us, for that which verily is, turns out to be that which ought to be, and religious faith, like scientific faith, cannot help

anticipating that what ought to be, either is or will be. There are departments of religious belief which are capable of being tested by experience, but there are others in which no such test is possible. Some minds will hesitate to accept as true what cannot be verified by experience, and will therefore suspend their judgment, neither believing nor denying. There are others, however, who have no such hesitation. To them it is sufficient that reason anticipates; they wait for the realisation of experience not to confirm, but to enjoy that of which they are already assured. The belief in immortality may be cited as an illustration of this difference. To some the belief is an anticipation of the mind, founded upon indications which are perceived, and arrived at by a process of reasoning, but lacking that certitude which experience can alone give them. To others the belief is also an anticipation of the mind, but the data upon which it is founded and the process of reasoning by which it is reached are convincing in themselves. They are so convinced, that is, that there ought to be a life beyond the veil, that they have no doubt there is one. To them the necessity which thought perceives, is a greater guarantee of reality than the necessity involved in an actual experience. They would sooner trust to an examination of the thought of mankind on this question, than they would to the testimony of the actual experience of any one man or any

number of men. Of such minds it may be said that while their belief in immortality is supported by the resurrection of Jesus, their acceptance of the fact of that event is due, not merely or chiefly to the historical argument, but to their prior belief in the immortality of the soul. They may not commit themselves to any theory which seeks to explain the resurrection, but they are assured that Calvary was not and could not be the end of that unique life of the Man of Sorrows. To them the life of Christ is unintelligible apart from the resurrection. The one is the prelude to the other, and if the prelude is actual fact, the sequel cannot be mere fancy. The resurrection is in a certain degree a confirmation of the belief in immortality, but that which strengthens the belief is not the resurrection, but the life of Jesus. That life has emphasised as no other life has ever done, the idea of the persistence of the individuality of man, its independence of material conditions, its essentially spiritual environment. The grave was an impossible goal to such a life. The pangs of death were birth-throes for such a life, and the grave could not possibly hold Him (see Acts ii. 24).

While this is true of some types of mind, it must be confessed that to others the testimony of the senses is a more sure witness. They are slow to believe all that is prophesied. They believe that some things are too good to be true. They are the Thomases of history, loyal to the core,

ready to die with their Master, but accepting slowly and cautiously the news which is too optimistic for their belief. Such men and women are wrongly classified as doubters or sceptics, and blamed for their lack of faith. They are under the tyranny of the senses, and their minds cannot move with confidence except by means of the aids which the senses yield. They are more to be pitied than blamed, for they are themselves the chief sufferers. The interview between Thomas and the risen Christ is full of significance as marking Christ's attitude to a type of mind which was the exact opposite of His own.

Thomas is only mentioned on one previous occasion, but that throws considerable light upon his character and temperament. When the news was brought to Jesus that His friend Lazarus was ill, and Christ proposed to return to Judæa, the disciples reminded Him that the Jews had but lately sought His life in those parts, and expressed surprise that He should again venture into the midst of His foes. Thomas foreboded the worst, but his loyalty never wavered. "Let us also go, that we may die with Him," he suggested to the other disciples. There was evidently a good deal of the pessimist in the man's nature, but there was a nobility and courage which triumphed over the fear that struck a chill to his heart. If his imagination anticipated the worst, it did not daunt him with a craven fear. His was the courage that was

not oblivious of danger, but calmly looked it in the face. The weakness of the flesh doubtless caused him to take part in the sudden panic which took hold of all the disciples when their Master was arrested, but Thomas had the willing spirit of the martyr who can face the contemplation of death, and march with steady step to meet his fate. His mind must have chiefly occupied itself after the crucifixion in brooding over his sudden flight, and blaming himself for following the others in their panic of fear. It was the death of Christ upon which he meditated, and the lost opportunity of sharing it with the Master he loved. The news, therefore, of the resurrection took him by surprise, and his mind refused to forsake its accustomed journey to the cross of his lost opportunity. There all his thoughts centred, because it was there he felt he too ought to have died. Nothing would bring back that lost chance, and remorse with sharp teeth bit into his soul. It is extremely probable that while the others went to visit the tomb, Thomas went to Calvary to go over again those last scenes, and scourge his soul afresh with vain regrets. This would account for his absence from the first meeting of Christ with His disciples in the upper room, on that memorable first day of the week. Fresh from the scene of the crucifixion where he has seen the whole tragedy of the nailing to the cross and the spear-thrust into the side re-enacted, his mournful thoughts are suddenly broken

in upon by the other disciples with the announcement that they have seen the Master, and their hearts are overflowing with joy.. The two states of mind are in marked contrast to one another, and hence opposition is to be expected. Thomas is in the depths of despair and humiliation, while they are on the mount of exultation. Over and over again he has said to himself, "He is dead, He is dead; would God I had but died with Him." The disciples meet him with the words, "He is alive, and we have seen Him." To Thomas, in the frame of mind in which he is, it is simply incredible. "Impossible!" he says. The only conception of his Master in harmony with his thoughts is as he saw Him in the agony of death. What they have seen must be a delusion, a fancy, the construction of their own imaginations, but not the crucified Lord. "I," he answers, "cannot and will not believe it. I must have a greater assurance than that which even sight affords. I must touch the print of the nails with my own finger, I must thrust my hand into the gaping wound which the spear-thrust has made, ere I can believe that He whom I forsook in the hour when He needed me most, is not dead but alive." There is no coarse materialism here; it is the agony of despair for a crime for which he can never forgive himself. His remorse makes it impossible for him to believe the news, which is too good to be true. It is no trick of the imagination to which the mind of Thomas

will submit. The wish can never be the father of the thought to the man who is in the despair which remorse produces. The great outstanding fact which haunts him night and day is the dead body of the Master whom he deserted. The print of the nails and the spear-thrust have burnt themselves into his soul. The blow of the hammer is still ringing in his ears. The pierced side with its open wound is ever before his eyes. That is the awful tragedy from which he cannot escape, and by which the fancies of the other disciples must be tested. No ghost or hallucination can alter the terrible reality. Angel, or devil, or shade, he will demand an answer which shall satisfy him. If they are masquerading in some ghostly appearance of his Master, he will demand the one proof which can alone satisfy him,—the print of the nails and the mark of the spear-thrust. The man's courage is equal to the task, for it is the courage of despair, and he is careful to be present at the time and place of the last week's appearance.

The disciples are waiting in joyful anticipation of a renewal of the visit, but Thomas is still dwelling on his lost opportunity. He is in the upper room with the others, but his mind is still at Calvary, and the cross and the dead Master are before his eyes. Suddenly the words, "Peace to you," break the silence of the room, and Thomas raising his head sees the living Master in their midst. There is the old kindly smile on the face as

He calls to the one disciple whose heart is being eaten away with remorse, and invites him to apply the test by which alone he could believe the good news which the others had told him. "Bring," says Christ, "that finger and that hand of yours upon whose testimony you lay so much stress, so that that feeling may assure sight; and be no longer an unbeliever but become a believer." There is a kindly chiding of the man for allowing room to the thought that the news was too good to be true. There is the genial sarcasm at the importance Thomas has attached to the evidence of that finger and hand of his.

Thomas has no need to apply the tests he has made so much of. This is no masquerade, or shade, or ghost; it is the Master Himself. The recognition is instantaneous and beyond the possibility of a doubt. It is not merely that the body is the same; it is that the tones of the voice and the character are the same. No one but his Master could have spoken like that, no one but his Lord could have understood him like that. It is this which calls forth his enthusiastic response, "My Master, and my God." If he has been the last of the disciples to admit the fact of the resurrection, he is the first to recognise its significance. The conviction is borne in upon his mind that there is more here than mere humanity, there is divinity. This is no theological speculation, it is a spontaneous recognition that in the Master

whom he has known and loved, there is a relationship to the Father, unique and essentially different from that of other men.

In Christ's answer there is a recognition of the limitations of Thomas's nature, for while congratulating the more fortunate, he does not condemn the others. Thomas is to be pitied rather than blamed for the tyranny of the senses under which he lives. It is a handicap which deprives him of blessings which others receive. In the present instance an unusual experience has been vouchsafed him, but he has to learn that to walk by faith is a happier experience than to walk by sight. Happy indeed are those whose faith is independent of the confirmation of sense perception, whose faith is not a mere hope but a glad and joyful anticipation. "Because you have seen Me, you have believed; blessed are they who have not seen, and yet believe." This is no arbitrary pronouncement; it is a declaration of actual fact, which the experience of life fully bears out. Lack of faith is a misfortune, not a fault; an appeal for compassion, not a cause for blame. Thrice happy are they who can believe even though they cannot see; whose minds can pass where sense fails, and can arrive at convictions which strengthen and inspire their souls. In the spiritual and moral realms nothing can really be too good to be true. That which establishes its goodness, establishes also its truth. There are things which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, and

which it hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive, which God hath prepared for those who have entered into the relationship of love; but these are the things which being too good to be conceived by the human mind, have been conceived by the Divine Mind. The good must for ever surpass the conception of the human mind, but the reality will always transcend the highest good the human mind can anticipate. We may fear that immortality is too good to be true, but we cannot believe that what awaits us beyond the veil is less than the highest we have been able to conceive. It will doubtless surpass, but it cannot fall short of our highest and best conception.

We thank Thee, Lord, that Thou hast kept
The best in store :
We have enough, yet not too much
To long for more,—
A yearning for a deeper peace
Not known before.

Amidst all the discussion to which the resurrection of Christ has given rise, there is one objection that never has been, and never can be raised, namely, that it ought not to be true. Almost all the attempts to explain the origin of the belief in the resurrection, make use of the hopes and expectations, not of the disciples, for which there is next to no evidence, but of humanity as it contemplates the life of Christ. The writers seem to feel that they have to show that the belief arose naturally

from the conviction that the grave is not and cannot be the goal of such a life. The theories therefore derive whatever strength they possess from the plausibility of their explanations of this fact. The fact itself, however, requires explaining. The why, and not the how, is the important factor. Jesus Christ has brought life and immortality to light through His gospel. Even the rejection of the historical fact only leads the mind to predicate an immortality of some kind or other, vague and shadowy though it is. The fact is, the grave cannot hold Him. The stone which our lack of faith places upon the grave is sooner or later rolled away, and we look into an empty tomb. The seal which our rationalistic criticism places upon the death and burial is in vain, for the disciples proclaim that He is risen. The news is not too good to be true; the opposite is the fact, for the Gospel of Life, and that more abundant, which Christ has given to the world, is too good to be false. There are still some who doubt, to whom the happiness of faith is withheld, who do not believe because they have not seen. Thrice happy are they who though they have not seen have yet believed, and joyfully proclaim their faith "in the resurrection and the life everlasting."

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